

# **ART & LANGUAGE AND THE POLITICS OF ART WORLDS, 1969-1977**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2012

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
THE DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

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My dissertation reassesses the role conceptual art played amidst the transition from modern to contemporary art during the second half of the twentieth century by focusing on the movement's international scope and structure. My inquiry centers on Art & Language, an art collective comprising dozens of conceptual artists, and I emphasize a rarely discussed but absolutely essential aspect of their work together: the collaborations they undertook between the United States, England, Australia, and Yugoslavia that employed travel, exhibitions, publications, correspondence, and communication technologies to forge an unwieldy but productive alliance between likeminded thinkers and practitioners on three continents. I account for the art and writing that emerged from this interconnected web in terms of the innovative artistic and political strategies that Art & Language developed by prioritizing written and spoken language, and I situate their work relative to the realignment of international relations during the period of their association. In so doing, I show how Art & Language conceptualized opposition to the emerging global art world, which was — as it remains — driven primarily by monolithic institutions and official discourses. I argue that Art & Language's preference for interpersonal contact and intercultural exchange provides tools for articulating a politics of artistic activity adequate to art's loss of autonomy and its gain of worldliness during the passage from modern to contemporary art.

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## PREFACE

I could not have written this dissertation without support from a great many people and institutions, and I want to offer sincere thanks to as many of them as possible.

My thesis committee — Terry Smith, Kirk Savage, Josh Ellenbogen, Giuseppina Mecchia, and Douglas Fogle — provided valuable feedback on my writing and guided my development as an art historian with exceptional care and generosity. I will draw on the examples they set as scholars for the rest of my life. I owe Terry a special debt for his untiring commitment during more than a decade as my teacher and for never allowing his status as one of the objects of my research compromise his role as its primary supervisor.

Considerable thanks are due to the participants in Art & Language past and present for their vital help with my research. Karl Beveridge, Sarah Charlesworth, Carole Condé, Michael Corris, Joseph Kosuth, Nigel Lendon, Mel Ramsden, Terry Smith, Mayo Thompson, and Paul Wood met or corresponded with me or made private archival materials available. Avril, Daniel, and Rebecca Burn showed me generous hospitality during a crucial research visit to Sydney, as did the Smith family: Terry, Tina, Blake, Kier, and Susan. Zoran Popović provided much needed research materials and information pertaining to his collaborations with Art & Language. Unfortunately, I never met or corresponded with Charles Harrison, though my debt to his example is beyond measure and evident throughout the dissertation, nowhere more than where our approaches diverge.

A number of esteemed colleagues contributed to my scholarly development either as interlocutors, including Vito Acconci, Alexander Alberro, Tony Bond, Luis Camnitzer, Thomas Crow, Okwui Enwezor, Hal Foster, Leanne Gilbertson, Charles Green, Boris Groys, David Joselit, Sandy Kirby, Liza Kirwin, Lucy Lippard, Ian Milliss, Libby Otto, Petre Petrov, John Smith, Ann Stephen, Rod Stoneman, and Reiko Tomii.

Several galleries, museums, libraries, and institutions assisted with research, and I want to thank the staffs of each: Museum of Modern Art, New York; Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington; Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; British Library, London; Frick Fine Arts Library, University of Pittsburgh; Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh; Barco Law Library, University of Pittsburgh; Schaeffer Library, Power Institute, University of Sydney; Lisson Gallery, London; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; castillo/corrales, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris; Trevor Fuller at Place Gallery, Melbourne; and Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto.

In addition to a Mellon Fellowship, I benefited from funding provided by the Luce Foundation, The Friends of Frick Fine Arts, the College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh, and the Wilkinson Travel Fund.

My colleagues in the Department of History of Art & Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh made graduate student life easier with their collegiality. I thank faculty members Drew Armstrong, Gretchen Bender, Kathleen Christian, Gao Minglu, and Barbara McCloskey as well as my fellow graduate students Cristina Albu, Brianne Cohen, Heidi Cook, Hilary Culbertson, Amy Cymbala, Julia Finch, Isabel Galeria, Jessica Glaser, Jessica Gogan, Gerald

Hartnett, Nadav Hochman, Karla Huebner, Josie Landback, Katie Martin, Alexandra Oliver, Nicole Pollentier, Miguel Rojas-Sotelo, Don Simpson, Henry Skeritt, and Aaron Tacinelli. Staff members Linda Hicks, Emily Lilly, Natalie Swabb, Veronica Gazdik, and Matt Nauman are much treasured by many, myself included.

Other colleagues and friends created a vibrant artistic community in Pittsburgh, including Dan Byers, Jordan Crosby, Michelle Halabura, Elizabeth Hoover, Joel McKim, Rita Mockus, Heather Pesanti, Melissa Ragona, Marilyn Russell, Anastasia Rygle, Eric Shiner, Lucy Stewart, and Matt Wrbican. Cheers to Amanda Phillips Chapman, Schuyler Chapman, Joanna Collins, Chris “Gomez” Gloria, Andrew Hearin, Robin Hoffman, Katherine Kidd, Jonathan Livingston, Javier O’Neil-Ortiz, and Alicia Williamson. Friends in New York defrayed expenses by opening their homes to me during research visits. I thank Mike Byhoff, Jenna Hymes, Mollie Kornreich, Jen Marshall, and Matt Schatz.

When I was young, Ann Bromberg, Lauri Dickinson, Gary Johnson, Jane Mahon, and Larry Smith opened my eyes to art, and I am forever in their debt.

My parents Bob and Gwyn showed unwavering generosity without which I could not have completed my research, let alone finished writing, and my brother David made his home in Los Angeles — and his car — available to me on numerous occasions, for which I am grateful.

Lastly, Maura McAndrew provides constant encouragement and love, and this dissertation is dedicated to our life together.



## INTRODUCTION

Not quite a think tank, not quite an art movement, not quite a rock band, and not quite a political party, Art & Language is an internally contested and outwardly perplexing organization that has reconfigured itself countless times during an ongoing history spanning nearly half a century. The collective has not one but many disparate histories, and these overlap, conflict, diverge, and intersect with one another as well as countless other histories of twentieth century art. However, Art & Language work made in England, where the collective has its origins, has received the most attention and focus. Work that the collective did elsewhere is usually ignored or considered derivative of this work. When this happens, the group's radical heterogeneity is misrepresented as univocal consistency, and a major casualty of this tendency is the section of Art & Language that operated from New York between 1969 and 1977 and pushed the collective's multiplicity to extremes by involving not only their English counterparts but also artists living in Australia, New Zealand, and Yugoslavia in their pursuit of a fundamentally different approach to art by developing a multifaceted and continuously evolving community. Over the course of their brief existence, this group, politically inclined toward the far left, endeavored to radicalize their art-world peers as part of a larger effort to transform society.

Art & Language began to associate during the mid-1960s at Coventry College of Art in England and took “as a point of initial enquiry the language-use of the art society.”<sup>1</sup> This group quickly established a profile as early proponents of conceptual art by prioritizing language to an unprecedented degree as both a medium and subject matter, and, in 1969, they turned to a coterie of likeminded artists based in the United States to help them further explore the possibilities opened up by their shared linguistic orientation. This transatlantic overture inaugurated a period during which New York became a hub for international collaborations in Art & Language’s name that involved dozens of people in major roles and countless others as minor participants. In 1976, the collective’s New York section disbanded, which effectively brought this activity to a close, but in the eight-year interval of their existence, they witnessed the consolidation of today’s global art world, and, by pursuing dialogue through transnational sociality and international collaboration, attempted to shape it as a site where the political, economic, and military interests of dominant world powers could be meaningfully contested.

In New York, Art & Language met regularly downtown at Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden’s loft at 250 Bowery on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, Joseph Kosuth’s studio at 24 Bond Street in NoHo, and Karl Beveridge and Carole Condé’s residence at 49 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street in the East Village among other places. Burn is Australian, Ramsden is English, Kosuth is American, and Beveridge and Condé are Canadian; each came to New York because of its reputation as a center for art but became frustrated with what they found there. Internally multinational from its inception, this group gathered to talk about art; the making, display, and viewing of it; as well as the discourse, markets, and institutions that accrue around such things. Over the course of their association, this talking — most of it oral, some of it written — ranged widely over art’s implication in linguistic,

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<sup>1</sup> [Art & Language], “Introduction,” *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969): p. 10.

cultural, social, political, economic, historical, legal, philosophical, scientific, educational, geographical, communicative, and technological matters. Gradually, the group expanded beyond New York and conducted seminars in such places as Melbourne, Adelaide, Auckland, and Belgrade. Like Art & Language itself, many of the participants in these seminars were students, and for them, talking together supplemented more formal education. For all involved, in New York and elsewhere, talking enabled the discussants to assume responsibility for directing their own learning, and Art & Language conceived of this form of affiliation as an alternative to existing approaches to art and also an alternative to the conditions in which art is usually practiced.

Talking, including the messiness of arguments, digressions, and lapses into nonsense, was the primary means by which the New York section of Art & Language pursued their work, and all that they prepared for exhibition or publication refers back to their talking, whether literally in the form of a transcript or in more heavily mediated formats appropriate to the occasion. The artworks, journals, writings, films, videos, and musical projects that Art & Language forged in their crucible of talk testify to constant development of their conversation and continuous evolution as a group. A couple of prominent people in New York provided opportunities for them to present this work before larger audiences: John Coplans, Editor-in-Chief of *Artforum* during a period when the magazine had a leftist orientation, published writings by participants in Art & Language, and John Weber, a dealer sympathetic to their artistic and political radicalisms, represented the collective at his gallery, which shared space in a building at 420 West Broadway in SoHo with Leo Castelli Gallery, André Emmerich Gallery, and Sonnabend Gallery, all significant spaces showing major artists. Such opportunities were,

however, the exception rather than the rule for Art & Language's New York section, and much of the initial reception of their work took place overseas and obscurely.

In this regard, Art & Language's English section fared better, as did the reputations of those participants in the New York section who had artistic careers prior to their association with the collective. They featured in early and now landmark survey exhibitions of conceptual art such as *When Attitudes Become Form* and *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, both of which were partially organized by people associated with Art & Language, including Kosuth, Burn, and Charles Harrison, an art historian and long-time associate of the collective's English section, and this established their importance to the nascent movement.<sup>2</sup> Their work has come to exemplify conceptual art's use of language to challenge art's partiality for the visual and to question the priority of the art object, both of which the preceding generation of modernist artists assumed, as had several centuries' worth of artists previous to them. Harrison calls this the "suppression of the beholder," and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh refers to it as the "elimination of viscosity."<sup>3</sup> Already in 1979, Boris Groys, drawing from his experiences of unofficial art in the

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<sup>2</sup> Harald Szeemann was the curator of *When Attitudes Become Form*, but when a version of the exhibition traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, Charles Harrison, a long-time associate of the group, served as organizer. See Harald Szeemann, *When Attitudes Become Form* (Bern and London: Kunsthalle Bern and Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969). See also Christian Rattemeyer and other authors, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969* (London: Afterall Books, 2010). Though *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* was officially organized by Donald Karshan, Kosuth and Burn, who were then beginning their association with Art & Language, effectively functioned as ghost-curators. See Donald Karshan, *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*. (New York: New York Cultural Center, 1970). On Kosuth and Burn's involvement in this exhibition, see Ann Stephen, *On Looking at Looking: The Art and Politics of Ian Burn* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2006), pp. 133-143.

<sup>3</sup> For the "suppression of the beholder," see the title of the second chapter of Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001). For Buchloh's formulation, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some aspects of Conceptual Art 1962-1969)" in Claude Gintz, ed. *L'Art*

Soviet Union and speaking of conceptualism beyond any geographically or chronologically bound movement, characterizes it along these same lines as:

any attempt to withdraw from the production of artworks as material objects intended for contemplation and aesthetic evaluation and, instead, to thematicize and shape the conditions that determine the viewers' perception of the work of art, the process of its production by the artist, its positioning in a certain context, and its historical status.<sup>4</sup>

A similar approach informs the major retrospective exhibitions of conceptual art organized since the late 1980s.<sup>5</sup> Again, the collective's English section and the individual careers of the New York section's earliest participants are better represented than Art & Language work done in New York. Nevertheless, Art & Language's inclusion in these exhibitions solidified their

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*conceptuel, une perspective* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989), p. 41, reprinted in revised form as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): p. 107. On both Harrison's and Buchloh's formulations, see Thomas Crow, "Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art" (1995) in Alexander Alberro and Sabine Buchmann, eds. *Art After Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, MA, London, and Vienna: The MIT Press and Generali Foundation, 2006), pp. 53-64.

<sup>4</sup> Boris Groys, "Moscow Romantic Conceptualism' (1979) in *History Becomes Form: Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2010), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds. *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975* (Los Angeles, Cambridge, MA, and London: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and The MIT Press, 1995) and Ann Goldstein, *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968* (Los Angeles, Cambridge, MA, and London: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and The MIT Press, 2004). For art historical accounts of the art object's fate during this period, see Pamela M. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001) and Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2005).

reputation within the history of twentieth century art, and Harrison's contributions to the catalogues accompanying them proved instrumental in shaping their art historical profile.<sup>6</sup>

Harrison's primary concern when discussing conceptual art and Art & Language is identifying "epistemologically adequate and philosophically interesting" to establish that both are as compelling as the modernist art they succeed and as deserving of attention as the traditional art object was for hundreds, if not thousands, of years prior.<sup>7</sup> For Harrison, such merit rests on ontological grounds, and he argues that conceptual art in general but especially Art & Language prioritize the contingencies of ongoing "art work" over the more definite "art object."<sup>8</sup> In other words, Harrison argues, in conceptual art, making and doing come to the fore in a manner without precedent as themselves subject to artistic shaping, and the act of working, or even the act of working on the act of working, eclipses the completed results of work to become the prime locus of art and its site of greatest interest.<sup>9</sup>

Readers of the most extensive record of Art & Language's history, which Harrison prepared piecemeal over several decades, will find that, in accounting for the collective's way of working, he accords little importance to the transnational character of Art & Language or their

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<sup>6</sup> See Charles Harrison, "Art Object and Artwork" in Gintz, *L'Art conceptuel*, pp. 61-64 and Charles Harrison, "Conceptual Art and Critical Judgment" in Christian Schlatter, *Art conceptuel formes conceptuelles: Conceptual Art and Conceptual Forms* (Paris: Galerie 1900 Δ 2000, 1990), pp. 538-554.

<sup>7</sup> Harrison, "Art Object and Artwork," p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> For a more substantive theoretical elaboration of this shift with reference to recent collaborative art practices, see Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004) and Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

work, and even admits that he is “avowedly partial and Anglocentric.”<sup>10</sup> He mentions what he calls “different priorities in England and New York” or “divergence of interests” between the collective’s two main sections, and he specifically indicates that

The tendency in ‘English’ work was for priority to be accorded in the last instance to the organizing potential of formal and logical systems, and for the materials and persons thus organized to be treated as relatively incidental. ... The tendency in New York was for priority to be accorded to the composition of a working community and to the nature of its concerns.<sup>11</sup>

Though this characterization is not inaccurate, Harrison pays substantially more attention to England, where he was a firsthand witness to events, than he does to New York, and he makes scant mention of Australia, New Zealand, and Yugoslavia. These two facts are not unconnected, as New York, not England, was the primary nexus of Art & Language’s international collaborations and the socially and politically oriented work that emerged from them. Had he considered these other sites of Art & Language in greater depth, his admission that “Art & Language could identify no *actual* alternative public which was not composed of the participants in its own projects and deliberations” would not ring so fatalistically.<sup>12</sup> It was precisely because Art & Language’s first and best audience was its own participants that the New York section

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<sup>10</sup> Harrison, *Essays on Art and Language*, p. 127. Harrison’s earliest effort, coauthored with Fred Orton, *A Provisional History of Art & Language* (Paris: Galerie Eric Fabre, 1982), has been superseded by two more comprehensive volumes: the aforementioned *Essays on Art & Language* and a companion volume Charles Harrison, *Conceptual Art and Painting: Further Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001). In addition to numerous texts scattered throughout exhibition catalogues and other publications, a volume of interviews Harrison gave late in his life includes yet another account. See Charles Harrison, *Looking Back* (London: Ridinghouse, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, p. 103, p. 115, and p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> Harrison, “Art Object and Artwork,” p. 63. Emphasis in original.

actively pursued international collaboration and sociality. In the last instance, their “projects and deliberations” were not ends unto themselves but means to directly form an “*actual* alternative public” coextensive with their work.

In a pair of texts from the mid-1970s, Terry Smith, himself associated with Art & Language in New York and later Australia from 1972 to 1976, captures the way in which the New York section diverged from the English section in their working interests. An essay entitled “Art and Art & Language,” which was published in 1974 but begun two years earlier, includes Smith’s first account of the collective. He identifies two periods in their history, the first of which is “a distinctively A&L set of intentions” that arises in the their journal *Art-Language* around 1969 and attempts “to construct a complex methodology for a nonspecialist critical discourse which would function in the ‘interstices’ between some of the concepts and procedures raised thus far within specialisms such as art, philosophy, sociology, etc.”<sup>13</sup> This project that Smith describes presented certain difficulties that led the collective to explore “the logical, linguistic, and psychological sets which appear to be problematic in considering the possibility of a program such as the initial one.”<sup>14</sup> This second phase presumably began in 1972, when Art & Language undertook a new major project involving indexes in part as a way to sort out earlier work. Others have referred to this early work as “purely,” “exclusive,” or “strong” conceptual art, and it remains that for which Art & Language is best known.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Terry Smith, “Art and Art & Language,” *Artforum* (February 1974): p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Kosuth speaks of Art & Language exemplifying “*Purely* conceptual art” in Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy” (1969) in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. Gabriele Guercio, ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 27. Peter Osborne considers Art & Language as “*exclusive* or *strong* conceptualists” in Peter Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy” in Michael Newman and Jon Bird, eds. *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 49. All emphases in originals.



Smith elaborates concerns specific to the New York section in a 1975 text written to introduce Art & Language to Australians and to accompany a series of exhibitions and seminars he organized in Melbourne and Adelaide. In this text, he extends his period theory of Art & Language's history to incorporate more recent developments that respond to, and to a large degree, move away from earlier work in more social and political directions. In addition to "'Analytic' 1969-70" and "'Theory-trying' 1971-2" periods that correspond roughly to those identified in 1974, Smith adds "'Intersubjectivity' 1972-4" and "'Praxis' 1974-5."<sup>16</sup> These latter two account for developments in New York, where Art & Language's attempts to work through their analytic and theoretical concerns entailed a need to examine their sociality as a group, which in turn necessitated interventions of a political character both inside and outside of that group. Chris Gilbert describes this as characteristic of Art & Language's concern for "the institutional life... of a collective practice."<sup>17</sup> For the New York section especially, he suggests that this involves the group's "own intragroup relations."<sup>18</sup> If Gilbert captures the inwardness of Art & Language's sociality and politics, Alexander Alberro describes how the New York section also pursued relations external to their immediate group. He writes of an aim "to create public dialogue among various factions of the contemporary art world" and to bring "a plurality of diverse and even antagonistic voices" together.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Terry Smith, *Art & Language Australia* (Banbury, New York, Sydney: Art & Language Press, 1976), pp. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Gilbert, "Art & Language and the Institutional Form in Anglo-American Collectivism" in Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds. *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Gilbert, "Art & Language, New York, Discusses Its Social Relations in 'The Lumpen-Headache'" in Michael Corris, ed. *Conceptual Art: Theory, Practice, and Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 326.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Alberro, "One Year Under the Mast: Alexander Alberro on *The Fox*," *Artforum* (Summer 2003): p. 163.

Early explanations of conceptual art's politics centered on what Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler characterized as "the dematerialization of art."<sup>20</sup> Any hope that conceptual art's challenge to the art object spelled the end of the commodity form and with it the capitalist art market was dispelled as dealers and collectors found clever ways to buy and sell even the least visual and most physically reductive examples of conceptual art with the same ease — and for equally large sums — as more conventional works of art.<sup>21</sup> This having become evident, Buchloh, in an account that has been much discussed and proven widely influential, identified a different sort of politics at work in conceptual art by calling attention to its critiques of art's institutions and of art as an institution, including artists who engage critically with the political function of the museum and the impact that the physical space of the gallery has on art; such art has retroactively been designated by the shorthand institutional critique.<sup>22</sup>

Whether the artistic critique of institutions has the effects desired by its enactors or supporters is open to debate, though art's capacity to attempt such critiques is undoubtedly an important part of conceptual art's political legacy. Incidentally, Ramsden made the first use in

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<sup>20</sup> See Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968): pp. 31-36. For Art & Language's critique of Lippard and Chandler's article, see Terry Atkinson, "Concerning the Article 'The Dematerialization of Art,'" in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 52-58. See also Lippard's book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972...* (New York: Praeger, 1973) and her retrospective essay "Escape Attempts" in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds., pp. 17-38.

<sup>21</sup> On the marketing of conceptual art, see Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> See Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969." See also Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub, "Joseph Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub Reply to Benjamin Buchloh on Conceptual Art," *October* 57 (Summer 1991): pp. 152-157; Benjamin Buchloh, "Buchloh Replies to Kosuth and Seth Siegelaub," *October* 57 (Summer 1991): pp. 158-161; and Charles Harrison, "Conceptual Art: Myths and Scandals," *Artscribe* 80 (March-April 1990): pp. 15-16. For a variety of perspectives on institutional critique, see John C. Welchman, ed. *Institutional Critique and After* (Zürich: JRP|Ringier, 2006) and Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009).

print of the term “institutional critique” in a way consistent with its current usage in an essay that calls its effectiveness as a political strategy into question without denying altogether its potential impact.<sup>23</sup> By drawing attention to the inherent contradictions of artistic institutions, institutional critique laid important groundwork for another of conceptual art’s political legacies: the postmodern critique of representation both linguistic and pictorial, the so-called “Pictures Generation,” which, in order to perform its task, requires both objects and visual emphasis.<sup>24</sup> As this art and the critical apparatus attending to it developed, Art & Language treated them both with hostility, referring to the structuralist and poststructuralist thought on which postmodern critics drew as the French disease and, in the process, beginning a protracted feud with *October* magazine, where some of the earliest strong defenses of postmodernism in the visual arts appeared.<sup>25</sup> Art & Language were not averse to acknowledging problems with representation, but they refused to dwell on them at such length that their work returned to the obsession with self-critique that was also at the heart of modernist painting and which entailed the forestalling of the social thrust that, despite its potential for failure, conceptual art also made possible. Instead, they found a measured balance between self-examination and worldly obligation, and in so doing contribute a different political legacy for conceptual art: a socially committed art that endeavors to bridge local concerns and more pervasive structures and forces.

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<sup>23</sup> Mel Ramsden, “On Practice,” *The Fox* 1 (1975): pp. 66-83, which is reprinted in Alberro and Stimson, eds., pp. 170-205. Alberro credits Ramsden with this first in Alexander Alberro, “Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique” in Alberro and Stimson, eds., p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> See Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, eds. *Art After Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, MA and Vienna: The MIT Press and the Generali Foundation, 2006) and Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York, New Haven, and London: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> For the opening salvo in this dispute, see Art & Language, “The French Disease,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 4 (October 1976): pp. 23-34.

Though Art & Language critiqued both institutions and representational strategies, these are always components of a broader cultural politics, the main thrust of which lies elsewhere. Part of what conceptual art's devaluation, not dematerialization, of the object entails is recognition of the social aspects of doing art, and sociality always involves people whose institutions and representations are not the same, which is this is to say that conceptual art is at its root transnational, and this provides opportunities for politics. Many conceptual artists, especially Art & Language, seized them. Conceptual art has an exceptional capacity to operate internationally because it is so often transitional, ephemeral, repeatable, and, above all, portable. A perfect vehicle for traveling, mobility is one of its great subjects. It abounds with maps, documentary snapshots, telegrams, and other physical manifestations of human movement and communication between places. Many of its best-known practitioners have made work by sending it through the mail. Others have recreated work as occasion dictates in one place or another, at one time or another, as they travel the world. Conceptual artists are the first artists to be routinely represented by galleries in more than one country at the same time, and they are the first artists since the decline of classical influence to relocate to other countries in large numbers for reasons of personal preference rather than war or persecution, which owes something to the reduced cost and availability of overseas airfare beginning in the 1960s. To a large degree, conceptual art's politics involve the manner in which it navigates and recreates the transnational condition that is its historical situation and the kinds of community it actually forms and embodies as it does, and Art & Language are exemplary in this regard.

Awareness of conceptual art's internationality is not new. Harrison notes its "extreme internationalism" in his 1969 essay for the exhibition catalogue accompanying *When Attitudes*

*Become Form*.<sup>26</sup> The following year, Kynaston McShine introduces *Information*, a major survey of recent art at the Museum of Modern Art that pays special attention to conceptual art, as “an international report,” and he highlights contributions from Latin American and Eastern European artists.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, detailed scholarship on what Sophie Richard calls “the international network of conceptual artists” remains nascent.<sup>28</sup> Art historians say surprisingly little about what kinds of relationships conceptual artists and those supporting their work formed with one another across national borders. Moreover, only preliminary treatments have been given to the broader conceptualist tendency that emerged globally starting in the 1950s and became, by the 1980s, the artistic equivalent of a lingua franca.<sup>29</sup> The habit of professionalizing art historians as regional and period specialists may well lie behind their difficulties reckoning more substantively with topics such as encounter, exchange, interaction, communication, translation, conflict, incommensurability, discrepancy, and separation, each of which is, paradoxically, something art historians experience routinely as they do their work.<sup>30</sup> It might be expected that they would

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Harrison, “Against Precedents” (1969) in Christian Rattemeyer and other authors, *Exhibiting the New Art*, p. 195.

<sup>27</sup> Kynaston McShine, “Acknowledgements” in *Information* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-77 Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections* (London: Ridinghouse, 2009) Richard’s study is limited to North America and Western Europe, as is the important exhibition *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976*. See Christophe Cherix, *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009). Also relevant is Suzanna Héman, et al., eds., *Conceptual Art in the Netherlands and Belgium 1965 – 1975: Artists, Collectors, Galleries, Documents, Exhibitions, Events* (Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Stedelijk Museum and NAI Publishers, 2002), which considers several transatlantic connections.

<sup>29</sup> On global conceptualism, see Luis Camnitzer, et al., *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Welcome exceptions to this art historical tendency include T. J. Demos’ account of exilic tropes in Marcel Duchamp’s life and work and Hiroki Ikegami’s study of Robert Rauschenberg’s travels through Europe and Asia during 1964 as costume and set designer for the Merce

have a great deal to say about these subjects, yet there is, surprisingly, no broadly accepted and widely practiced art historical correlate to comparative literature, which treats these topics with respect to literary texts.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps there ought to be. If “the inheritance of Conceptualism, ignored if not derided by the majority of art historians, provides the field of art history with its best current resources of theoretical understanding” as Thomas Crow proposes, then nowhere are the odds on his wager better for art historians than where they concern conceptual art’s internationality generally and Art & Language’s in particular, both of which provide opportunities to eschew the traps of specialization and seek the universality of the particular in its many formulations.<sup>32</sup>

One major casualty of deficient art historical treatment of international topics is an underdeveloped history of the art world, Art & Language’s main subject during the period of their transnational configuration. A thorough account of its origins would no doubt recognize the art world as a modern phenomenon made possible through a series of important historical developments beginning in the early modern period and complete by the end of the Enlightenment. First among these is a new social status for artists as professionals and intellectuals, which is signaled by the publication, in 1550, of Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*. (It is worth noting that it is the artist’s life that is of interest to Vasari, as life will recur as an important theme.) The rise from craftsman status corresponds to burgeoning markets for art,

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Cunningham Dance Company. See T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2007) and Hiroko Ikegami, *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> For an exemplary attempt at rethinking comparative literature in response to recent history, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. viii.

such as existed first in the Dutch Republic, which increased demand for art from a wider public and enabled artists to work outside of traditional forms of patronage that limited their agency in the creative process. This fostered the artist's intellectual growth and is followed by the emergence of two kinds of institutions that recognize it: first, academies, such as the *Académie de peinture et de sculpture* in Paris (founded in 1648) and the Royal Academy of Arts in London (founded in 1768), that provide economic and intellectual support for artists and art students (and enabled the development of art theory, as, for instance, in the case of Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses*); second, museums, which collect art and connect artists with larger audiences than they previously had through public exhibitions such as the Salon. This necessitated the development of art criticism as a distinct literary genre by writers such as Denis Diderot, further contributing to the intellectualization of art. Shortly thereafter, Kant and Hegel provide an aesthetic philosophy that confers autonomy upon art as a specific human activity, and, by this point, all the necessary components of an art world are in place. They are, in sum, a combination of new professional duties for the artist combined with institutional, discursive, and public recognition of art as a distinct type of intellectual activity. Another way to explain the art world is that it grants art sovereignty over itself at the expense of making it subject to language: the language of art history and art criticism, of pedagogical practice and institutional decree, of philosophical clarification, and so forth — all of which put art in relation to the rest of human society. In short, art worlds arise as a result of the linguistification of art and arrive at the possibility of art's recognition as a theoretical practice rather than a functional craft.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Art in Theory* is, of course, the title of the three-volume compendium of writings on art since 1648 co-edited by Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, published by Blackwell, and subtitled *An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. One way to conceive of this massive scholarly

However, this is just to describe the emergence of art worlds. What finally confirmed their existence, during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, was resistance to them by the one figure who had essentially no role in their preparation: artists. It was only then, when, the measure of an art world could be properly taken by locating the boundaries that some artists sought to transgress, that its existence could be registered as the socially constructed, historically variable theoretical domain, upheld by institutions, in which art finds itself as itself. What is so remarkable about these challenges is that they do not occur in the entirely dismissive manner by which, for instance, Plato banishes mimetic art from his ideal polis in *The Republic* or, to take a more contemporaneous example, Rousseau laments the demoralizing effects of the arts in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* and of the theater in his *Letter to d'Allembert on the Theater*. Instead they occur precisely in the name of art. Romanticism marks the first attempt to escape, reject, or contest the art world in this other manner, anticipating Courbet and the avant-gardes that follow, all of which challenge the discourse of art worlds with alternative discourses — this is the great age of manifestos, after all — in order to practice different kinds of art (including anti-art), and thereby, hopefully, to make possible other kinds of life. With Romanticism, hope remained that art worlds could be abolished, that the institutionalization of art could be undone, and that language could be stripped of its rationalizing force to revel freely in its raw emotive power. By the time of Courbet, who in turn rejects the *Exposition Universelle* that rejects him and creates his own pavilion for showing his work in 1855, the art world is no longer eradicable, but it remains possible to establish an enclave outside of it, the *Pavillon du Réalisme*, at least temporarily. The historical avant-gardes faced the problem of the art world's tightening grip on

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resource, produced by two former associates of Art & Language, is as a documentary record of the history of the emergence, recognition, and development art worlds.



art, which ensured that even their most bohemian efforts to live an unconventional life by making an unconventional art remained tied to the social power organizing the art world by what Clement Greenberg aptly described as “an umbilical cord of gold.”<sup>34</sup> By the twentieth century, art had become ensconced in art worlds, and since then, it has had to pursue its social function through them in one way or another. Any appeal to reality by art now passes through the art world.

New historical developments, such as World Wars, decolonization, and economic globalization created, by the mid-point of the twentieth century, a new way to think about art worlds, outside the fundamentally Euro-American account given so far. The existence of a plurality of art worlds that organize their affairs not only differently but also potentially incommensurably became impossible to avoid. Art & Language understood this particularly early and clearly, and they also recognized that what constitutes a political act in one art world — shocking a bourgeois audience by deliberately refusing to conform to their taste, dropping out of the art world’s institutions or refusing to take part in them, deskilling the production of art to resist its professionalization, and so on — could count as a politicization within that art world, but there exists no guarantee that such an act would be recognized (or even recognizable) as such in another art world; it could even have debilitating effects in that other art world, even if the act did not take place there. Therefore, if art is to have a capacity for politicization at more than a local level, it needs to operate between art worlds or, at the very least, with awareness of their existence and connectivity. Just as language proved crucial to the emergence of art worlds, language provided Art & Language with a means of communicating between them, specifically

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<sup>34</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*. John O’Brian, ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 11.

the English language, which traversed Anglophone countries — the United States, England, Australia, New Zealand, Canada — with ease, and which Art & Language's contacts in Yugoslavia, Argentina, Italy, and elsewhere also understood because English had become the *lingua franca* for commerce between art worlds, an outcome of the United States' artistic prominence following World War II. By challenging the English language in its applicability to art, Art & Language sought means for contesting the wider effects of what transpired in the art world centered in New York, which was also the hub for their international collaborations.

Art & Language do not arrive at this vision of linguistic access to and mediation between art worlds fully formed, nor does their pursuit of it last particularly long, and I narrate the history of their international collaborations as a process of rethinking the politics of the art world, including their struggles and, ultimately, impasses, across five chapters. That the overarching structure is that of a narrative is in contrast to a trend in the literature on Art & Language, much of it by former participants in the collective, to imitate the collective's literary manner, to try, that is, to do the type of work that Art & Language do and to do it about Art & Language.<sup>35</sup> While this approach is valid, even valuable, I prefer a comparatively more conventional narrative organization not least because the stylistic distance it creates from which to assess Art & Language historically and thus to show from an external angle why their project remains so pressing to these critics absorbed in its continuation. Moreover, the story of Art & Language's New York section has been told only in fragments, and it is questionable how helpful those fragments, essential in any case, can be without being situated in a broader narrative context, which is, at present, entirely lacking. Tracing this narrative reveals a number of important but

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<sup>35</sup> See, for a characteristic sampling, the essays collected in Charles Harrison, ed. *Art & Language in Practice, Vol. 2: Simposi crític / Critical Symposium* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1999).

neglected continuities that run across the drastic breaks and great distances that characterize Art & Language's history. Finally, and perhaps key given the concerns of this dissertation, only a narrative can capture the overarching thrust of Art & Language's politics of building community gradually and in relation to the contemporaneous state of the art world. All the same, it should also be noted that this is not a survey of Art & Language or even of the comparatively smaller body of work they did in New York but instead a selective account that no doubt privileges certain works while neglecting others, yet it is nevertheless a whole treating of Art & Language's international collaborations and their implications for the politicization of the art world.

The first chapter considers how Art & Language came to recognize the art world as a primary interest in their art and thought by considering how their particularly linguistically-oriented variety of conceptual art developed once Art & Language's founders in England began to associate internationally with artists in New York around 1969. It is in the work of this New York section that the term art world receives its most robust theorization in a series of artworks and theoretical texts of increasing ambition and scope that culminates in a 1971/1972 work entitled *Comparative Models* in which Art & Language not only provide a working theory of modernist art worlds and an account of the current state of the New York art world vis-à-vis in which they work vis-à-vis a critical reading of the leading art magazine *Artforum* but also voice a desire to transform or even replace that particular art world and even the concept of the art world as such that they theorize.

This leads rather directly into the second chapter, which investigates how the growing New York section of Art & Language participated in the collective's transatlantic project centered on the figure of the index and the act of indexing — the so-called “indexing project” of the mid-1970s. Following the completion of the landmark work *Index 01* for Documenta V in

1972, the New York section of Art & Language takes up a social approach to creating future indexing works by producing a series of textual annotations to one another's writings, which eventually results, after six months' work, in the 1973 artist's book *Blurring in A&L*, in which Art & Language offer reader's of their work an opportunity to participate in their collective virtually. These annotations and *Blurring in A&L* also have origins in the earlier *Comparative Models* project's declaration of a desire to challenge the art world, and I trace how the New York section pursue indexing in order to organize themselves as an art world in miniature — a replacement to the existing art world paradigm in New York. The chapter concludes with an assessment of a fundamental shift in Art & Language's work, whereby spoken rather than written conversation becomes the basis for their ongoing pursuit of this alternative.

The third chapter shows how this new emphasis on speech developed in the work of Art & Language Australia, which lasts from 1975-1976 and is more or less coextensive with four exhibitions (one of which was censored and never occurred) and the two publications that resulted from them (only one of which was realized). It is preceded by several years of writing done in New York on concerns relevant to Australia and its art. This chapter examines the emergence of provincialism and cultural dependency as themes taken up in Art & Language's work as well as how Art & Language addressed them by extending methods developed during the indexing project to a series of international collaborations with artists, critics, and audiences in Australia and New Zealand. After tracking the emergence of a discourse on provincialism in writings by Burn, Ramsden, and Smith, the chapter culminates with considerations of a series of Art & Language discussions held in Melbourne, Adelaide, and Auckland, in which the group broaden the scope of their international collaborations and, in so doing, limn insights first into what the rather one-sided exchange of modernism between the United States and Australia

reveals about broader power dynamics and, later, how media culture perpetuates misconceptions between Australia and New Zealand. By the end of the chapter, Art & Language begin to adopt a more aggressive political stance embodied in the belief that oppositional intercultural sociality such as their own collaborations, is the best way to counteract the harmful effects of power that they see emanating from all the art worlds upon which their work has touched.

If the first three chapters largely concern Art & Language's detection of the possibility of something else, perhaps a new art world, emerging to take the place of a fading modernism, then the two chapters that follow concern their attempts to deal with the implications of this, particularly those of a political character, and the possibilities for action to which they gives rise. The fourth chapter picks up Art & Language's transatlantic narrative, which renews itself in 1975 as the New York section announces *The Fox*, a new journal designed to pick up the radical leftist tenor of Art & Language's discussions and to supplement the collective's established journal *Art-Language*, which was edited in England. The already strained relationship between the sections now expresses itself in relation to the politics of artistic work. Art & Language's New York participants generally agree that the artist is an exploited worker, while, in England, an opposite belief in the artist as a bourgeois figure develops, and a debate begins over the economic implications of the class status of artists. The chapter tracks the resulting disagreement about the class status of the artist and the artist's role in class conflict through statements published in both journals and concludes by considering the decision, made jointly between the two sections, to adopt a series of provisions that, for the first time, explicitly qualify membership in Art & Language as a maneuver designed to expel certain people from continued participation in hopes of reuniting the divided collective around a shared political orientation.

The fifth and final chapter involves the complex array of international connections evident in the June 1976 exhibition at John Weber Gallery by (Provisional) Art & Language, the temporarily renamed collective that lasted for about one year following Art & Language's adoption of membership provisions. Despite hopes that these would unite them, this reformed group was, from its outset, beset by further internal tensions. Some of the New York participants, having established contacts with other politicized art collectives in New York as well as artists in Yugoslavia, where Art & Language held a series of discussions in 1975, proposed abandoning participation in the art world for more direct political agitation through the establishment of their own institutional space modeled after one they visited in Belgrade coupled with open opposition to state intervention in the arts, while others in New York, skeptical of forfeiting the advantages that an art world affords, advocated strengthening ties with England and continuing to pursue politics through the art world. These tensions reached a point of crisis during a series of meetings held as the John Weber Gallery exhibition hung at which a rift internal to the New York section proved too great of a contradiction to bear, and brought about both its demise and the end of Art & Language's international collaborations.

What persist beyond Art & Language's unfortunate stalemate are the new possibilities for art that originate in their turn to language. Conceptual art's devaluation of the art object reaches an apex in Art & Language's transnational association as the community driving their collective discussion rethinks previous conceptions of the work of art, the artist, and the art world, and art sheds its sensory capacities to focus on its power as intellection.

## 1.0 “A POSSIBLE ART-WORLD”

In 1969, the conceptual art collective Art & Language became a transnational organization. Previously, it consisted of four teachers and students at the Coventry College of Art in the English Midlands: Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin, and Harold Hurrell. This group came together to form a loose affiliation in the mid-1960s around a shared interest in modernism and the challenges to it that were emerging in different ways in both England and the United States. Initially, they collaborated informally; individuals carried on with their own practices and projects, while occasionally collaborating with one another or the whole group. The latter grew in frequency as all four began to prioritize language in their work, either by making works in conventional mediums, especially painting, that incorporate words and numbers; making paintings or sculptures augmented by explanatory texts; or, by taking this interest in language to a radical conclusion, and making works of purportedly visual art that exist entirely as texts or require texts to approach and access them. This turn to language necessitated venues appropriate to their practice, which was not always best served by the demands imposed by conventional gallery spaces, and soon the idea to collaborate on a printed journal led to the publication of the first issue of *Art-Language* in May 1969 after a few years of preparations. Subtitled “The Journal of Conceptual Art,” this new periodical announced Art & Language’s interest in the burgeoning conceptual art movement and provided the collective with its name.

Atkinson made Art & Language's first lasting international overtures in July 1969 while visiting New York from Coventry to publicize *Art-Language* and solicit content for future issues from artists residing there. While Atkinson stayed with Joseph Kosuth, arrangements were made for the latter to serve as "American Editor" of *Art-Language*. Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, friends of Kosuth's, were also brought into the fold as contributors to the journal, and this small group of three provided the foundation for an Art & Language section in New York that subsequently developed a considerable degree of independence from the section in England. After a few years of submitting their writings for publication in *Art-Language*, they began to create their own works of art in Art & Language's name. Kosuth's entry into Art & Language came as his own artistic career began to flourish. In 1965, he relocated to New York from Cleveland to study at the School of Visual Arts, and soon he, along with other early conceptual artists including Weiner, Robert Barry, and Douglas Huebler, found himself represented by the innovative dealer and gallerist Seth Siegelaub, who included work by Art & Language in several of his seminal early exhibitions of conceptual art. Shortly thereafter, in 1969, Kosuth had his first major solo exhibition — drawn from his ongoing *Art as Idea as Idea* series — at the prestigious Leo Castelli Gallery, which effectively positioned him as one of the most promising young artists of the time and situated him at the forefront of the emerging conceptual art movement. Burn and Ramsden met Kosuth not long after they came to New York together from London in 1967, to which they both emigrated separately from Australia in 1964. They had met previously at art school in Melbourne, where Burn, a native of nearby Geelong, had come to study, and where Ramsden found himself after his family relocated to Australia from England while he was a teenager.<sup>36</sup> After three years in London, they brought their individual and collaborative

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<sup>36</sup> On the work that Kosuth, Burn, and Ramsden did prior to their association with Art &



practices to New York, drawn by the important modernist painting and minimalist sculpture being produced there. Upon arrival, they quickly developed an interest in language and conceptual art.

Art & Language's prior attempt to connect with American artists met with mixed results. The first issue of *Art-Language*, published two months before Atkinson arrived in the United States, includes texts by Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, and Lawrence Weiner, all conceptual artists then based in New York, and Art & Language's editorial introduction to the first *Art-Language* expresses a desire for "contributions from American artists," an intent "to furnish a comprehensive report of conceptual art in the U.S.A.," and a claim to "point out some differences [...] between American and British conceptual art," though not "a clear and definite boundary between them."<sup>37</sup> Despite the overtures to conceptual artists in the United States, Art & Language quickly realized that the term "conceptual art" applied to a wider range of practice than they were strictly interested in considering, and they dropped the subtitle "The Journal of Conceptual Art," as they told the French art critic Catherine Millet in 1971, "because it was associated with too varied a spectrum of artistic activity."<sup>38</sup> Graham, LeWitt, and Weiner never again contributed texts to *Art-Language*. Apart from his "Introductory Note by the American Editor," which led off the second issue of *Art-Language*, neither did Kosuth, though he remained

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Language, see the first two chapters of Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). On Burn's early work, see also the exhibition catalogue *Ian Burn: Minimal-Conceptual Work 1965-1970* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> [Art & Language], "Introduction," *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969): p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Millet, "Interview with *Art-Language*" (1971) in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 262.

involved with Art & Language until 1976.<sup>39</sup> Burn and Ramsden, however, became avid contributors to *Art-Language* and, in a string of publications there, engaged with Art & Language's interests in language, theory, and their relation to art. This, in contrast to the practices of *Art-Language*'s first contributors from the United States, whose work, though involved with ideas and concepts, tended to treat them as prelude to the creation of objects or the enacting of performances — LeWitt spoke, in 1967, of the idea as “a machine that makes the art” — rather than, as Art & Language and their new associates did, as something that works of art, whether objects or not, should aspire to theorize and generate.<sup>40</sup>

These new participants in Art & Language quickly provided their English predecessors with two important opportunities to exhibit their work in New York. In 1970, Kosuth and Burn functioned as ghost curators — officially, the curator was Donald Karshan — of *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* at the New York Cultural Center.<sup>41</sup> Kosuth and Burn included work by Art & Language amongst the “conceptual art” portion of the exhibition along with their own work under Kosuth's name and that of the Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis, to which Burn and Ramsden, as well as Roger Cutforth, belonged at the time they became involved with Art & Language.<sup>42</sup> Only three other artists were so included: Christine Kozlov, who had

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<sup>39</sup> Joseph Kosuth, “Introductory Note by the American Editor,” *Art-Language* 1, no 2 (February 1970): pp. 1-4.

<sup>40</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (1967) in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> See Donald Karshan, *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*. (New York: New York Cultural Center, 1970). On Kosuth and Burn's involvement in this exhibition, see Ann Stephen, *On Looking at Looking: The Art and Politics of Ian Burn* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2006), pp. 133-143.

<sup>42</sup> The Society for Theoretical Art & Analysis produced “proceedings,” which were published on three occasions: Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, “Proceedings” in *Information* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), pp. 32-35; The Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis (Ian

collaborated with Kosuth previously on the foundation of the short-lived Lannis Gallery, which was briefly renamed The Museum for Normal Art; Frederick Barthelme, whose text “Three from May 23rd, 1969” Kosuth forwarded for inclusion in the second issue of *Art-Language*; and On Kawara, whom Kosuth ranked amongst the few practitioners of “*purely* conceptual art” that he singled out in his important “Art after Philosophy” essay of 1969.<sup>43</sup> *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* presented an argument that there were two kinds of conceptual art, or, to be precise, only one type of art that properly deserved the name. The other art in the show, including such prominent conceptual artists as Weiner, fell under the heading “conceptual aspects” for sharing formal similarities with the more rigorously philosophical and analytical text-based works of Kosuth, Art & Language, and the Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis. According to the distinction drawn by the ghost curators, though, art with conceptual aspects was stylistically similar to conceptual art but not, in the end, in pursuit the same aims that Kosuth and Burn claimed were proper to it. It did not, as Kosuth phrased his understanding of conceptual art in “Art After Philosophy,” sufficiently “question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art’s nature.”<sup>44</sup>

Burn reinforced the alliance between the so-called “analytic” conceptual artists by organizing Art & Language’s first solo exhibition in New York, which opened September 7,

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Burn, Roger Cutforth, and Mel Ramsden), “Proceedings,” *Art-Language* 1, no. 3 (June 1970): pp. 1-3; and The Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis, “Proceedings,” *Art and Australia* (September 1970): p. 168.

<sup>43</sup> On the Lannis Gallery and The Museum of Normal Art, see Gabriele Guercio, “Introduction,” in Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. Gabriele Guercio, ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. xxii-xxiii. For Barthelme’s work, see Frederic [sic] Barthelme, “Three from May 23rd, 1969,” *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): pp. 8-10. For Kosuth’s designation of Kawara as a “*purely* conceptual art,” see Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy” (1969) in Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After*, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” p. 18.

1971 and consisted of a series of taped lectures on subjects ranging from “Motivation” and “Deontology” to “Concerning Analyses” and “The Nature of Orthodoxy” that played repeatedly in the Dain Gallery on Madison Avenue between 78<sup>th</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> Streets, the owner of which, Robert Dain, employed Burn in his framing shop. In a statement accompanying the exhibition, Art & Language provided “A Short Introduction on the Work.”<sup>45</sup> In it, they note the “considerable confusion in regarding ‘Conceptual Art’, both from within its rather vague boundaries as well as from without.” Against a “tendency to stress the diversity of means” employed by conceptual artists, Art & Language propose that their own work is “as different from other Conceptual Art as it is from painting and sculpture.” Specifically, they emphasize “an alternative to asserting in the ready-made context” in their early, theoretically inclined work that evolved into “a ‘natural’ emphasis on such theory and constructs rather than any material aspects.” If a conventional Duchampian readymade locates the conditions in which art is possible by calling attention to the various discourses and institutions that sanction a material object as a work of art, then Art & Language are here calling for a different approach to art that simultaneously extends the Duchampian legacy of the readymade while also abandoning its emphasis on the materiality of the object presented as an artwork.<sup>46</sup> Art & Language propose working directly at the level of the “theory and constructs” or “knowledge” that determine what can be conceived as art, hence their declaration that the work they do “seems to have adequacy simply ‘as knowledge’” because it assumes both “a ‘critical’ attitude within the work” as well as

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<sup>45</sup> Art & Language, “A Short Introduction on the Work,” statement accompanying the exhibition “Exhibition of Lectures: The Art & Language Press,” Dain Gallery, New York, 1971. This text is reprinted in its entirety in Michael Corris, *Conceptual Art: Theory, Practice, Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> On Duchamp and conceptual art, see the roundtable discussion entitled “Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp” in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, eds. *The Duchamp Effect* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 205-224.

“responsibility for such knowledge as is engendered” by the work. Here, Art & Language go beyond the critical dimension of the Duchampian readymade, which fixes the limits of art as an institution, by working on the knowledge that institutions uphold and that, in turn, upholds them.

The year before Art & Language’s show at the Dain Gallery, Burn and Ramsden produced a small object that they entitled ( *INDEX ( MODEL (...))* ) in which they give a name to this body of knowledge and theory that they propose analyzing. The piece consists of an essayistic text divided into numbered passages, which are pasted, along with copious accompanying bibliographic entries that refer to current books and essays in philosophy, the philosophy of language, linguistics, and other academic disciplines, onto over one hundred index cards all housed in a Rolodex. The first of these cards reads, “Any description of ‘the art-world’ is a description of a possible art-world,” and it introduces what subsequently becomes a major theme in Art & Language’s work: the art world.<sup>47</sup> This choice of theme also illuminates the appropriateness of a Rolodex as a medium for presenting the text. As devices for storing personal and professional contacts, Rolodexes are quasi-institutional objects popular amongst those in the emerging knowledge economy of the 1960s that maintain social cohesion and thereby provide a sense of community by connecting people to one another. As the title of the piece indicates, Rolodexes are both indexes to worlds and models of worlds, and Burn and Ramsden’s is an analytical index and a model of the art world.

Another card in the Rolodex contains a revelation that clarifies why art worlds interest Burn and Ramsden so much: “One doesn’t deal with art-works but art-worlds.”<sup>48</sup> This statement marks a fundamental turning point for Art & Language, and especially for Burn and Ramsden,

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<sup>47</sup> Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, ( *INDEX ( MODEL (...))* ), card number 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, card number 621.

away from previous approaches to art. The work of art or the art object cedes priority to the art world or art worlds that maintain a certain understanding of art and configure the coordinates through which one can “deal with” works of art. From this point forward, Art & Language’s New York section begin to think extensively about art worlds and even to propose the creation of new ones. The primary means through which they pursue this enterprise is language. The links between art worlds and language is already explicit in ( *INDEX ( MODEL (...))*); Burn and Ramsden propose, “The official language that we employ to speak about ‘art’ contains an implicit ontological commitment.”<sup>49</sup> A new language, then, would mean a new ontological commitment and a new art world.

The art world as a concept received a boost in popularity when, in 1965, the philosopher Arthur Danto published an essay entitled “The Artworld,” in which he postulates a definition of it as “an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art.”<sup>50</sup> Surprisingly, Danto’s essay is not referenced in the bibliography portion of ( *INDEX ( MODEL (...))*), and Burn and Ramsden seem not to have been familiar with it at the time. Nevertheless, the term was in the air during the 1960s and 1970s; Danto might say that it was part of its own atmosphere. Instead of using Danto’s definition, Burn and Ramsden turn to a pair of episodes in intellectual history to articulate their own original theory of the art world in an important sequence of cards that demonstrate how values, beliefs, and attitudes generate theoretical biases that project through a person’s or a culture’s worldview. The sequence beginning with card number 431, which

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, card number 73.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (October 15, 1964): p. 580. The classic study of art worlds is Howard S. Becker, *Artworlds* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1982). For more recent perspectives on art worlds, see Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, eds. *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Kantz Verlag, 2009) and Pamela M. Lee, “Boundary Issues: The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism,” *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (February 2003): pp. 164-167.

contains descriptions of ancient Greek speculation about the existence of a continent in the southern hemisphere:

431

There has been speculation about a large land-mass, roughly where Australia is now known to be, for several thousand years before any ‘empirical evidence’ for its existence [sic] was available. What was offered to

substantiate the claim was logic. To the ancient Greeks, it was logical, even necessary, that this land-mass existed in the world. The Pythagoreans and Eratosthenes in Alexandria had satisfactorily confirmed that the earth was spherical: Their reasoning was sound and they believed it to be the only

logical possibility in (what they also believed to be) a well-ordered world. Plato wrote in Timaeus: “...(the world) is a globe, because like is fairer than unlike, and only a globe is alike everywhere. It rotates, because circular motion is the most perfect....”. If it was to be a well-ordered world, then what was most probable was that south corresponded to

north: Since there were large land-masses in the north, they predicted the existence of a great continent in the south. It followed also to reason the existence [sic] of climatic zones and, since the land-mass they knew about was within the

temperate zone in the north, it must be that the great continent would be in the temperate zone in the south. They also speculated about the

people who lived there — since the north was inhabited, the south likely was also inhabited in a well-ordered world.

This explanation of the ancient Greek worldview is followed shortly thereafter by a similar run of cards that relate how, for medieval Europeans, such conjecture about the existence of a southern continent was inherently misguided:

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By comparison, during the Middle Ages, philosophy and geography were interpreted from the Scriptures. Geography had to be consistent with the Scriptures and these say nothing of the earth being round — so the inventions of the Greeks were distrusted

and the concept of Australia became herecy [sic]. ‘Commonsense’ informed them that the face of the earth was flat. To accept the Greek doctrine, which conceived of ‘men carrying their heads downwards’, was to deny God as the Creator.

What is particularly interesting about this speculation about the existence of a continent in the southern hemisphere is not that one worldview correctly predicts its existence while another does not, as neither had the means to verify their predictions, but that, as Burn and Ramsden explain, “In each case the methods of reasoning are without fault, it is merely that the frameworks in



which the reasoning's take place differ vastly."<sup>51</sup> The implication for art and the art world is that people hold different consistent sets of ideas about what art is and can be, and that these ideas can be neither verified nor refuted through recourse to empirical observation.

The conclusion that Burn and Ramsden draw from these observations about how theory pertains to the world proves crucial for their future work on the art world with *Art & Language*:

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A model of the world then is not the model of the 'actual' world. While it may readily be claimed as a model of the 'actual' world, there can be however no satisfactorily verifying it as the model. It's then to be admitted as simply a model of a possible world.

If art worlds belong to the realm of possibility rather than actuality, then it is worth noting that they have actual consequences. Here, Burn and Ramsden's choice to develop their conception of art worlds through reference to Burn's home country is hardly neutral. In New York in 1970, Australian art was little acknowledged. This was so not because it did not, in fact, exist, but because the worldview of the art world in New York was such that there was no way to see or to realistically imagine art of consequence issuing from Australia. But even if the New York art world were to suddenly become enamored of Australian art, this would in no way be a reflection of actuality but rather a change in that art world at the level of what it acknowledges as possible and thus what possibilities it offers. Far from an idealist claim that art and art worlds are all in the mind, Burn and Ramsden's position is acutely aware of the real consequences of thought, and the material costs of biases and omissions increasingly occupy them as their investigations of the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, card number 46.

many art worlds they encounter continue to develop through subsequent work. Throughout, the idea that these worlds are not actual but only possible keeps open the possibility of creating other possible art worlds not subject to the shortcomings they subsequently identify.

Burn's short text-piece "Dialogue," which he published in the February 1970 issue of *Art-Language*, begins to open up a space for art to operate on art worlds as well as in them.<sup>52</sup> The text contains twelve sentences in four groups of three. The sentences — or the groups of sentences — are themselves in dialogue with one another and they show a theory of dialogue as much as they tell one. Observations about the way that "Artists are exploring language to create access to ways of seeing" — the first sentence — gradually reveal how the diminishing importance of visual experience in the work of art and lead to "a kind of dialogue or 'conversation'" implicating language, viewers, and the idea, which, taken together form "an actual area of the work."<sup>53</sup> Circumscribed within the "area of the work," the viewer is enabled in new ways: "Participating in a dialogue gives the viewer a new significance; rather than listening, he becomes involved in reproducing and inventing part of that dialogue."<sup>54</sup>

*Art-Language* was to be the first important forum for Burn and Ramsden's own dialogue about the art world, which is a major theme of a series of articles they coauthored and published during there 1972. In them, Burn and Ramsden make explicit their turn away from an idea that had been important to the emergence of conceptual art several years earlier, an idea usually associated with the "analytic" version of conceptual art they practiced alongside Kosuth and Art & Language: namely, an interpretation of the readymade and the Duchampian legacy according to which an object becomes art when an artist nominates it as such. Kosuth, in "Art After

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Burn, "Dialogue," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

Philosophy,” cites Donald Judd’s quip, “If someone says it’s art, it’s art,” and defends the artist’s, specifically the conceptual artist’s, power to define art in and through his or her work.<sup>55</sup>

In the introductory essay that opens the first issue of *Art-Language*, the journal’s editors made a gesture of precisely this sort: “Suppose the following hypothesis is advanced: that this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what ‘conceptual art’ is, is held out as a ‘conceptual art’ work.”<sup>56</sup> Three years later, in the essay “Four Wages of Sense,” Burn and Ramsden interrogate exactly this kind of hypothetical scenario:

But if one were to hold (e.g.) this article within the standard denotive constraints (as, of course, **anything** may be held if one goes along with the kind of contention that if someone says it’s art, it’s art) then one would simply infuse it with a status superfluous (and, in fact, misleading) to its understanding.<sup>57</sup>

Rather than uphold or challenge the idea that anything can be art, Burn and Ramsden here deflate its significance by suggesting that the novelty of nominating something new as art, far from being a radical questioning of art, in actuality detracts from consideration of the broader relevance of the thing in question as attention is drawn to the question of whether or not it is art over and above the more important question of what, art or not, it is.

In “Some Questions on the Characterization of Questions,” published in *Art-Language* in the summer of 1972, Burn and Ramsden highlight the importance of the social context in which art is made over and above the question of whether or not a thing is art and here they complicate their earlier, epistemological approach to art worlds with a more sociological account of how knowledge is supported and maintained. Early in the essay, they propose that

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<sup>55</sup> Joseph Kosuth, “Art After Philosophy,” *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> [Art & Language,] “Introduction,” *Art-Language* 1, no. 1 (May 1969): p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Burn and Ramsden, “Four Wages of Sense,” *Art-Language* 2, no. 1 (February 1972), p. 29.

One could not teach someone, who is a stranger to our culture, what a member of our culture is doing when he presents an art-work in a gallery without, in the process of doing so, teaching him something about the way in which galleries function in that system of (public) operations which make up our 'Art-world'.<sup>58</sup>

Over the course of the essay, Burn and Ramsden characterize the "Art-world" as "Modernist," and they use this term to refer to the majority of the art of their present, including "the recently manufactured revival of painterly abstraction and stylist mutations of Minimalism."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, they blame "the 'ideological innocence' of supporter critics" for creating the artificial demand for stylistic novelty.<sup>60</sup> This vision of modernism as a succession of styles exemplifies, for Burn and Ramsden, what Arthur Danto calls "methodological individualism," according to which "a field of study is causally dependent upon the individualistic cognitions of the art-worker and not the other way around."<sup>61</sup> In other words, the art world operates under the assumption, which Burn and Ramsden take to be mistaken, that the agency of the individual artist trumps the social context in which he works. In contrast, they argue that "A psychological 'art is anything the artist says is art' doesn't explain any specific aspect of our knowledge of a societal and normative framework."<sup>62</sup> They furthermore suggest that adherents to methodological individualism make a "fetish" of the physical art object that reifies the psychology and behavior of the individual artist.<sup>63</sup> As a consequence of such fetishism, the

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<sup>58</sup> Burn and Ramsden, "Some Questions on the Characterization of Questions," *Art-Language* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1972), p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1-2. On "methodological individualism," see Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 257.

<sup>62</sup> Burn and Ramsden, "Some Questions on the Characterization of Questions," p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

history of art comes to resemble “a clear and single line of self-contained events. In other words it is mechanistic.”<sup>64</sup> Burn and Ramsden identify this iterative approach to art with a routine that “has become estranged from the epistemological conditions which made it possible in the first place.”<sup>65</sup> They assert that even art “that was characterized as ‘conceptual’” — and would therefore seem to escape from this mechanistic modernism — “can be seen as coarsely ‘post-minimal’” and therefore well within its parameters.<sup>66</sup> The art world is here pictured as vast, even totalizing in its reach, subsuming all art to its modernist narrative of stylistic novelty and innovation.

To overcome modernism and methodological individualism is not easy, of course, especially given that these ideas are long entrenched in the history of Western civilization; Burn and Ramsden suggest that “for Western man, many of these foundations lie in the nature of society itself. This is not just a platitude; for us, these foundations are often as ‘magical’ and unfathomable as natural relations are to aboriginal man.”<sup>67</sup> They conclude the essay with the cautious proviso that “it is obvious that much more needs to be said about all this,” and they do not fully articulate an account of what “methodological socialism” would entail beyond a few brief references to historical materialism, although, in the future, Marxist thinking would become increasingly important to Art & Language’s practice as they read Marxist literature more widely and more deeply to learn more about it.<sup>68</sup> Burn and Ramsden do offer at least one positive

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

suggestion for overcoming methodological individualism, however: “to articulate change is to seek to fully comprehend our social institutions, not to seek escape from them.”<sup>69</sup>

Concomitant with this theorization about the art world as a social institution, Burn and Ramsden undertook a project entitled *Comparative Models* (sometimes referred to as *The Annotations*) that was to yield the first works of art by Art & Language to be produced entirely in New York. They completed a first version of *Comparative Models* in January 1972 in anticipation of an upcoming Art & Language exhibition at Galleria Daniel Templon in Milan during 1973. The work is an installation designed to occupy the walls of a gallery, and it juxtaposes the entire contents of the December 1971 issue of *Artforum* magazine with typewritten texts coauthored by Burn and Ramsden that address many of the same concerns as their contemporaneous *Art-Language* articles. These texts are commentaries on selected passages in the magazine, and, in most editions of the work, sheets of translucent colored plastic indicate which passages from *Artforum* are the subjects of Art & Language’s criticisms. Burn and Ramsden give few precise installation instructions for the work. It may be installed as unframed pages pinned to the wall or framed before being hung. It may be installed as a single, long line or as a grid. Precisely how the *Artforum* texts and the texts by Burn and Ramsden are to be juxtaposed is also unspecified. Additionally, multiple copies of the work exist, and the text varies slightly from copy to copy. There is no single, authoritative text, which is characteristic of Art & Language’s work at the time, as the process of continuing to develop a project through accumulating drafts and revisions often results in no definitive copy.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> All citations to this version of *Comparative Models* are to a manuscript copy in the personal archives of Mel Ramsden, Banbury, UK. I have preserved, where relevant, the original

In 1972, *Artforum* was the leading contemporary art magazine, and so criticism of its contents effectively functions as criticism of the theoretical apparatus of the art world in which the magazine circulates.<sup>71</sup> By presenting an issue of *Artforum* stripped of its binding and hung on the wall sequentially from cover to cover, Burn and Ramsden transform the ordinary process of leafing through the magazine's pages one at a time into a confrontation with all of its contents simultaneously. This spatial reorganization emphasizes the magazine as a whole and frames *Artforum* as a complex discursive formation full of articles, advertisements, texts, and images: a panorama of the art world in the early 1970s. This art world then becomes the subject of Art & Language's counter-discourse: the comparatively humble, amateurish, typewritten texts that posit themselves as an alternative to the discourse it espouses.

In Burn and Ramsden's introductory text, they state their reason for creating *Comparative Models*:

The intention is to consider:

- (1) ARTFORUM as a model of an established art-world,
- and
- (2) the present text as a model of a possible art-world.

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typography. The text not paginated, so references will refer to the titles given at the tops of each page of the manuscript.

<sup>71</sup> On *Artforum* during this period, see especially Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: SoHo Press, 2003). Also pertinent are Hal Foster, "Art Critics in Extremis" in *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 104-122 and Thomas Crow, "Art Criticism in the Age of Incommensurate Values: On the Thirtieth Anniversary of *Artforum*" in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 85-93.

The possible model is intent on revealing a change in paradigms. As a consequence of this it will introduce the concept of a paradigm shift and not necessarily characterize the form of a new paradigm.<sup>72</sup>

From the outset, Burn and Ramsden conceive of *Artforum* as representative of the art world as a whole, and they also draw a connection between art worlds and what Thomas S. Kuhn calls paradigms. Burn and Ramsden's understanding of paradigms and paradigm shifts owes much to Kuhn's 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which presents comprehensive theories of both of these concepts.<sup>73</sup> Kuhn defines paradigms as, simultaneously, two things: they are "the constellation of group commitments" or shared traits (advanced degrees, professional societies, readership of journals) that unite a scientific community, and they are also the "exemplars" or specific beliefs that such a community shares.<sup>74</sup> Occasionally, research within a paradigm generates results that seem to contradict its fundamental assumptions, and, should these results continue to prove anomalous, then what Kuhn calls "normal science" — the process of "puzzle-solving" that improves "the scope and precision with which the paradigm can be applied" — is no longer possible.<sup>75</sup> The discipline enters a revolutionary period, the purpose of which is to develop a new paradigm capable of accounting for all the things the old paradigm could explain but also the anomalous results that it could not, and once the scientific community

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<sup>72</sup> Art & Language, *Comparative Models*, first version, "Comparative Models."

<sup>73</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Art & Language read this book in its second edition of 1970, which is the first edition to contain a postscript Kuhn wrote in 1969 that clarifies the concept of the paradigm. He wrote this postscript in response to various critics, especially Margaret Masterman. See her "The Nature of a Paradigm" in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 59-89.

<sup>74</sup> See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, pp. 181-191.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 36. On normal science, see especially chapters 2-4.



settles on a new paradigm, then what Kuhn calls a paradigm shift has taken place and normal science resumes within the newly adopted paradigm.

Burn and Ramsden's decision to account for the art world along the lines of Kuhn's conception of the paradigm makes sense given that he shares their awareness of the codependence of sociality and knowledge, and it results in a picture of artists and critics engaged in what might be called normal art. Their chief complaint about *Artforum* and, by extension, the art world is that artists and critics belonging to the "ARTFORUM Model" are "satisfied with the 'specialized' elaboration of the existing model and are ignorant of any need to create alternate 'possible' models."<sup>76</sup> They "agree to perpetuate the established model as it is. Their criterion of 'value' is internalized: i.e., to 'succeed' within the known model — they thereby lose sight of externalized realms of value."<sup>77</sup> This specialization and internalization appears problematic to Burn and Ramsden for two related reasons: the task of the artist is narrowly defined as the creation of physical objects — artworks — that exemplify the art world's values uncritically; this, in turn, prevents comprehension of the art world's role in various social and cultural structures, which ultimately serves the interests of capitalism and the art market. In Burn and Ramsden's words,

The network of relations, constructs, work, objects, etc., which may be said to constitute the ARTFORUM Model can be seen to be the consequence of the passive acceptance of reification. This 'spell' enraptures most forms of public life in our society. Of the ways that Capitalism limits the kinds of art produced and

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<sup>76</sup> Art & Language, *Comparative Models*, first version, "The Priority of Paradigms."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, "The Priority of Paradigms." Elsewhere, Burn and Ramsden refer to H. L. A. Hart on the distinction between internal and external. See Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, "Four Wages of Sense," p. 33. For Hart, see his *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

the relation of art to the rest of society, Andrew Higgins has stated that the social and economic system, through the division of labor, deprives the artist of a real response to his work and, through the objective relations of the market, turns his meanings into commodities.<sup>78</sup>

To ensure the stability of this arrangement, the art world relies on its “capacity to ‘automatically’ characterize all related activities as ‘high’ art or ‘low’ art.”<sup>79</sup> This prevents the recognition of anomalies that would threaten its paradigm by dismissing them as “low” and thereby retaining its capacity to adhere to its presuppositions without questioning them.

Unwilling to participate in this kind of activity, Burn and Ramsden seek an alternative. Against the specialized “ARTFORUM Model,” Burn and Ramsden propose a “Possible Model,” which “presupposes the questioning of presuppositions, i.e., it enquires into theoretical frameworks per se.”<sup>80</sup> Although, according to Burn and Ramsden, this “Possible Model” does not yet meet the criteria necessary to establish it as a paradigm, they nevertheless suggest that it might be “a basis for sorting out the questions involved in engendering a new paradigm.”<sup>81</sup> They characterize the difference between the “ARTFORUM Model” and the “Possible Model” through reference to the distinction that linguists often make between performance and competence.<sup>82</sup> Burn and Ramsden repeat a common example of this distinction: a person learning a foreign language does not master it by repeating back sentences he has already heard

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, “Paradigm Shifts.” For Higgins, see his “Clement Greenberg and the Idea of the Avant Garde” in *Studio International* 182, no. 937 (October 1971): pp. 144-147.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, “Paradigm Shifts as Consequences of Anomalies.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, “Paradigm Shifts.”

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, “A Model of Competence.”

<sup>82</sup> The classic formulation of the relationship between performance and competence is Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1965), which Burn and Ramsden reference.

but by learning the grammar of the language such that he is capable of constructing and understanding sentences he has never heard before; to repeat back is make a performance, but to understand grammar is to have competence in the language.<sup>83</sup>

The nine annotations that follow the introductory essay take up the task of fleshing out what a shift from the “ARTFORUM Model” of performance to the “Possible Model” of competence entails. The core idea is that, in Burn and Ramsden’s words, “art becomes a set of questions to be asked (meaning) and not a certain property to be looked for (quality).”<sup>84</sup> Thus the art world, which designates the quality that allows things to be identified as (good or high) art, reorients itself to inquire about itself, including how it participates within a broader social and cultural framework, and this is what Burn and Ramsden stipulate that their “Possible Model” provides:

a ‘model of competence’ seeks out value relations between the art-activity and the socio-cultural background at large.

A ‘model of competence’ replaces debate within the art-practice by debate about the whole practice or enterprise and the ontological/axiological/epistemic status of the practice of art.<sup>85</sup>

A more complete account of the *Artforum* paradigm and how an alternative to it might function appears in the second version of *Comparative Models*, which involved participation from two new people: Michael Corris, an art student at Brooklyn College, became involved with Art & Language in late 1971, but did not contribute to the first version of *Comparative Models*, and Terry Smith, an Australian residing in New York on a Harkness Fellowship and studying art

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<sup>83</sup> Art & Language, *Comparative Models*, first version, “‘Competence’ and ‘Performance’.”

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, “Annotation #8.”

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, “Annotation #3.”

history at New York University, who joined in early 1972 after being in contact with Burn and Ramsden from Australia, and he included their work in the 1971 exhibition *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?* at the Contemporary Art Society of Australia in Sydney, of which he and Tony McGillick were co-curators.<sup>86</sup> Shortly after becoming affiliated with Art & Language, both Corris and Smith began composing essays on issues that had been and would continue to be pertinent to the group. Corris' "The Fine Structure of Collaboration" appeared in *Art-Language* in September 1973.<sup>87</sup> In it, he discusses the sociologist Diana Crane's conception of the scientific academy as an "invisible college" or "information exchange group," and he applies this macro-level approach to "the problem of how the community is organized at the micro-level," that is, the smaller scale of a collective such as Art & Language.<sup>88</sup> The primary concern of Smith's text was less the internal structure of the group than its external reputation. "Art and Art & Language," which appeared in *Artforum* in February 1974, provided Smith with the opportunity to publish in the very magazine that Art & Language criticized as a chance to "characterize the Art & Language point of view" and refute misunderstandings about their work.<sup>89</sup>

While Corris and Smith drafted their essays, the New York section of Art & Language (again minus Kosuth) completed the second version of *Comparative Models*, which repeats the exercise undertaken in the first version but now with the September 1972 issue of *Artforum*. Like the first version, the second consists of all of the pages of the magazine along with typewritten

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<sup>86</sup> Terry Smith and Tony McGillick, *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?*. (Sydney: Contemporary Art Society of Australia, 1971).

<sup>87</sup> Michael Corris, "The Fine Structure of Collaboration," *Art-Language* 2, no. 3 (September 1973): pp. 34-37.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 34. On the invisible college, see Diana Crane, "Social Structure in a Group of Scientists: A Test of the 'Invisible College' Hypothesis," *American Sociological Review* 34, no. 3 (June 1969): pp. 335-352 and Diana Crane, *Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>89</sup> Terry Smith, "Art and Art & Language," *Artforum* (February 1974): p. 49.

annotations authored by Art & Language. The key difference between the two is that the issue they chose for the second version is *Artforum*'s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue, which contains a special section of essays written by many of the leading art critics of the time, including Lawrence Alloway, David Antin, Max Kozloff, Rosalind Krauss, and Francis V. O'Connor. These essays assess aspects of art practice and criticism over the preceding decade, and, as instances of the art world considering itself, they are ideal targets for Art & Language's annotations.

Though visually and procedurally similar to its predecessor, the second version of *Comparative Models* approaches *Artforum* differently. Where the first concerned itself with articulating a relationship between Art & Language and the art world by distinguishing the "Possible Model" from the "ARTFORUM Model," the second version focuses almost entirely on the discourse of the art world, and Art & Language make detailed and specific explanations of its limitations and what they find so troubling about them. In particular, they identify individualist and empiricist biases in *Artforum*, which they compare to the more social and theoretical approaches similar to those practiced by the group. The work contains eight total annotations, seven of which comment on four of the special anniversary issue essays (Antin's is not annotated). The first annotation is the lone exception; it appears near the magazine's front matter and introduces the work as a criticism of theories implicit in the writings of the critics who write for *Artforum*. It begins in a manner not dissimilar to the first version:

What is the relation between T and T<sup>1</sup> (where T<sup>1</sup> competes with T as the result of criticism)?

- T cannot be subsumed under T<sup>1</sup>
- T cannot be explained on the basis of T<sup>1</sup>
- T cannot be reduced to T<sup>1</sup>

- T<sup>1</sup> being critical of T is also inconsistent with T

The intentions of Artforum may, provisionally at least, be taken as T and [these Annotations as] T<sup>1</sup>.<sup>90</sup>

Like the first version of the work, the second version presents itself as a critical comparison of incompatible approaches to art. However, if T<sup>1</sup>, the alternative that Art & Language juxtapose to *Artforum*'s T, does not subsume, explain, or reduce it and is inconsistent with it, how exactly does it function critically? Later in the first annotation appears an answer: "T and T<sup>1</sup> are not isomorphic. The 'concern' however is not whether they are comparable but in the *structure of incommensurability* and the maintenance of incommensurable alternatives."<sup>91</sup>

Art & Language's interest in incommensurability stems from their reading of the philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend. In his book *Against Method*, Feyerabend attacks adherence to scientific method as incompatible with the growth of knowledge and advocates in favor of what he calls epistemological anarchy, an idea that held great appeal for Art & Language.<sup>92</sup> Feyerabend argued that

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<sup>90</sup> Art & Language, "Comparative Models" in *Art & Language* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1980), p. 51. All citations from the second version of *Comparative Models* are taken from this reprint of the text in the catalogue for Art & Language's 1980 retrospective at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. See also illustrations 48 and 49 in that volume.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>92</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (1975). 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1993). Although *Against Method* did not appear in book form until 1975, three years after the completion of *Comparative Models*, Feyerabend had been developing and publishing his views for some years prior, and Art & Language were familiar with many of these earlier writings. Especially important is an early version of *Against Method* published as "Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge" in Michael Radner and Stephen Winokur, eds. *Analyses of Theories and Methods of Physics and Psychology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), pp. 17-130. It is worth noting that Feyerabend was deeply interested in art, especially Dada, and he drew from this interest while formulating his account of epistemological anarchy. See *Against Method*, pp. 265-266.

A scientist who is interested in maximal empirical content, and who wants to understand as many aspects of his theory as possible, will adopt a pluralistic methodology, he will compare theories with other theories rather than with “experience,” “data,” or “facts” and he will try to improve rather than discard the views that appear to lose in the competition. For the alternatives, which he needs to keep the contest going, may be taken from the past as well. As a matter of fact, they may be taken from wherever he is able to find them — from ancient myths and modern prejudices; from the lucubrations of experts and from the fantasies of cranks. The whole history of a subject is utilized in the attempt to improve its most recent and most “advanced” stage.<sup>93</sup>

Art & Language absorbed these ideas and incorporated them into their work. In the essay “Frameworks and Phantoms,” written as the group created the second version of *Comparative Models*, Corris and Ramsden critique modernism for assuming that art functions like a “chronological step-ladder starting from Tiepolo” and suggest instead that supposedly outdated “Tiepolo-like art may still be possible.”<sup>94</sup> If Burn and Ramsden conceived of the first version of the project as an attempt to sort out how to undertake a paradigm shift away from the “ARTFORUM Model” to a new paradigm, then there is no question that Feyerabend significantly affected their aims, as the second version no longer aspires to develop a new paradigm to replace the art world. Instead, Art & Language take a considerably less orderly anarchic approach concerning artistic change: “There is a need to proliferate viewpoints, *if only* to combat the tyranny of unexamined systems, our own inhibitions, psychological dogma, and

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<sup>93</sup> Art & Language, “Comparative Models,” p. 33.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Corris and Mel Ramsden, “Frameworks and Phantoms,” *Art-Language* 2, no. 3 (September 1973): p. 42.

institutional rigidity.”<sup>95</sup> In the first version, *Artforum* and the art world appeared unsatisfactory because of the specifics of their paradigm; in the second, the very fact that they adhere to a paradigm is already cause for suspicion:

the art-world constitutes a special community and, like any other community, it programmes and processes its members to look at the world in certain favoured and prescribed ways — for example, through the filter of aesthetics mixed in with something known as individual style. Through countless continuous examples of stylistics it inculcates in its members the belief in the primacy and superiority of stylistics, but as a result it also fosters the belief that stylistics is *the* direct prerequisite for the proper expression and study of art. Thus the tradition becomes monolithic and unchallengeable precisely at the point where it is *most* challengeable.<sup>96</sup>

Art & Language resist adherence to a “monolithic” conception of the history of art as a sequence of successive stylistic changes by advocating for a comparative, even competitive, approach: “we wouldn’t like to replace one set of monolithic paradigms with another set of the same kind. We ought to try and address the monolithic system *by competition*.”<sup>97</sup>

In the second version of *Comparative Models*, Art & Language suggest that *Artforum* is bound by “two or three central paradigms.”<sup>98</sup> In each case, these paradigms prevent evaluation of the social contexts in which the art world participates. They single out “a covert sense in which the paradigm of the artist as ‘special’ individual, having ‘special’ perceptions of reality, and

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<sup>95</sup> Art & Language, “Comparative Models,” p. 54.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 52.



answerable only to himself, is operating throughout *Artforum*.”<sup>99</sup> Their annotations on Alloway’s and O’Connor’s essays take issue with the appearance of this paradigm. Of all the essays that Art & Language annotate, Alloway’s “Network: The Art World Described as a System” would seem to be the one most likely to meet with their approval given Alloway’s attempt to articulate a systematic account of the art world as something dispersed and complicated like a network. However, it is subject to their lengthiest and most thorough annotation.<sup>100</sup> Though Alloway shares Art & Language’s interest in the art world, they take issue with his assertion that artworks enter the art world after their creation. Art & Language note that in Alloway’s essay,

‘the first exhibition of a newly made work of art is in the studio’ is *followed by* this work ‘acquiring a record, not simply in terms of places shown and changing hands, but an aura of aesthetic interpretation as well. It belongs to the context of the art-world’.<sup>101</sup>

Art & Language juxtapose Alloway’s approach, which they refer to alternately as “the individualist paradigm of the individual artist” and “Seventeenth Century Individualism” to what they call both “the social paradigm of the individual artist” and “Historical Materialism.”<sup>102</sup> The former asserts that the “the context of art is seen as following from the individual work of art which is seen (in one way or another) as paradigmatic.”<sup>103</sup> According to the latter, “The individual work of art is seen as following from the context of art which is now seen as

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>100</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “Network: The Art World Described as a System,” *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (September 1972): pp. 28-32.

<sup>101</sup> Art & Language, “Comparative Models,” p. 55.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, pp. 55-56.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

paradigmatic.”<sup>104</sup> By comparing these two approaches, even in this rough, schematic way, *Art & Language* show that Alloway’s representation of an individual artist creating art in a studio unfettered by external factors is structurally limited by its inability to account for the role these very factors play in artistic creation.

O’Connor comes up for criticism for reasons similar to Alloway: for an insistence that artists have special insight into reality and possess the freedom to oppose themselves to dominant social values. They dismiss one passage from the essay as

a caricature of the individual artist as possessor of his or her own person and capacities, owing nothing to society for them. All the features are present: the hostile environment (i.e. fighting the ‘successes of the ‘art-world’, the materialistic society’ and so on) is efficacious in allowing for both (a) economic and popular success and (b) a rationale for those individuals who justify the fact that they haven’t ‘made it’ by laying claim to moral integrity. Under a claim of moral superiority the ‘purity’ of the individual posture is maintained. However, rather than generating a group of morally superior individuals, it generates an individual increasingly ignorant of the dynamics of the very community within which he is enmeshed.<sup>105</sup>

Not only does individual fail to account for external social factors, it also perpetuates those factors by fueling the art world economically and making those individual who lack a share of its wealth feel morally superior for doing so.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

Art & Language also detect an empiricist or positivist strain to *Artforum*'s discourse that relies on a naïve understanding of experience:

There is exemplified throughout *Artforum* an overt appeal to 'experience', an appeal which assumes that experience is a 'fact of nature' rather than a relatively localized of means of knowing. Experience is not a thing-in-itself but depends on being 'known by us'. In short, it is dependent on some means (paradigms, theories) of interpretation.<sup>106</sup>

In his essay, Kozloff discusses pre-Art & Language work by several participants in Art & Language, including Burn, Kosuth, and Ramsden, and cites their writings to argue that the emphasis conceptual art places on ideas results in experientially deficient art. Art & Language counter that Kozloff's identification of art with experience draws an untenable "split between art and the ideology of art."<sup>107</sup> Kozloff's identification of art with experience "is presupposed as immutable and universal, a rigid and unquestionable background through which we identify art."<sup>108</sup> Thus, for Kozloff, art is immediately given to experience, and non-empirical approaches are "ideological." But, as Art & Language argue, such a position "is actually a partisan appeal," and its presuppositions "are conventions and you can argue with them."<sup>109</sup> In other words, empiricism is no less "theory-laden" than any other approach to art.<sup>110</sup> To reveal the limit of the experiential paradigm, Art & Language simply point to the fact that "some modes of art" — they

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 58. On the idea that observation is "theory-laden," see N. R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). This book, which Art & Language read, was an important influence on Kuhn.

have in mind their own earlier work as conceptual artists — “may be incommensurable, *thus actually anomalous*” to it precisely because of their interest in ideas.<sup>111</sup> As with the individualist paradigm, Art & Language argue that the experiential paradigm prevents adequate consideration of social context. The distinction it makes between art and the ideology of art

is one means of upholding the Western world’s social contracts, as it prevents persons from dealing with their conventions. Through this split conventions are regarded as both unquestionable and incidental to the matters at hand.<sup>112</sup>

Art & Language suggest that Krauss exemplifies the third paradigm that they find pervasive in *Artforum*: modernism. In a single, brief annotation, they take issue with her “historicist version of the genetic fallacy,” the result of which is “monolithic art history; ‘real’ art must relate to *this* history. *That’s the argument against Modernist historicist ontology*. It has blithely assumed that this history is *the* history; alternatives look like crimes against nature.”<sup>113</sup> Though Art & Language do not explicitly tie Krauss’ article to an obfuscation of social context, Ramsden addressed this very relationship during a seminar he led with Corris at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax during November of 1972:

OK, so I’ve said there are a lot of advantages in an autonomous discipline because you can do a lot of detailed work there which would be completely impossible otherwise, and you can really get down to the nitty-gritty. But there’s one disadvantage for the people who are operating in these disciplines. They almost never engage in criticism of the underpinnings of their discipline and the result is, I think, that they become ideologically innocent. The kind of epistemology which

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<sup>111</sup> Art & Language, “Comparative Models,” p. 58.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

is involved in say, Manet, is not, I don't think, involved in Kenneth Noland. Although people like Michael Fried might say that's the whole point of modernism, I think that they got so far away from it that they just don't know really what kind of relations painting has with the world at large. It's become autonomous. So if they've become ideologically innocent, then I think this effectively destroys their ability to examine the value of their discipline as a whole, or, for example, in its sociological context.<sup>114</sup>

While Ramsden's tone is casual and his remarks somewhat over-generalizing, his point comes through: modernism, by suppressing whatever does not belong to its historical logic, blinds itself to the social exterior outside that logic. This casual tone, however, is also a deliberate part of Art & Language's effort to challenge the *Artforum* paradigm, which relies on a specialist jargon to defend its claims and refute whatever does not conform to them. (This may account for why Antin, a poet with a distinctive manner of writing, is not fit into the *Artforum* paradigm and subjected to Art & Language's annotations.)

Indeed, language, specifically language unlike that used in *Artforum*, is a crucial part of Art & Language's strategy. While they seem to adhere to the opposite of *Artforum*'s positions — collectivism not individualism, theory not experience, and historical pluralism not modernist teleology — their actual position is guarded by their use of language. Careful scrutiny reveals that Art & Language distance themselves from all of the paradigms they juxtapose in the second version of *Comparative Models*. Reading the text of the annotations closely, very few statements of position are attributable to the collective. They contain many rhetorical moves to separate the

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<sup>114</sup> Mel Ramsden quoted in Peggy Gale, ed. *Artists Talk: 1969-1977* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2004), p. 121.

authors from their text: frequent gender-neutral third person pronouns (“one,” “some,” “them”), heavy doses of the passive voice, the occasional shifter to introduce ambiguity, and words, such as “provisionally,” “perhaps,” “may,” and “might,” that weaken claims, defer them, or distance them from their author. Rather than commit to a single position, Art & Language prefer to manipulate and juxtapose other positions — to compare models. At one point, Art & Language make their refusal to commit more explicit: “It is to be emphasized that one model doesn’t rule out the other. There may also be half-way theories; also, there is no logical necessity at stake in choosing one model over the other.”<sup>115</sup> Soft language and abstention from paradigm choice enable Art & Language’s first attempt to practice a model of competence as a paradigm shift that does not end, an anarchic perpetual revolution opposed to a monolithic art world.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

## 2.0 TRANSATLANTIC INDEXING

In 1972, Joseph Kosuth traveled from New York to Kassel, Germany to help install *A Survey by the Art & Language Institute at Documenta 5*.<sup>116</sup> This work, now usually referred to as *Index 01* or the *Documenta Index*, was Art & Language's first major venture into what would become a central activity for the group: indexing. Indexing came to serve Art & Language in many ways, but in 1971, when planning for *Index 01* began, it was, as Charles Harrison has written, "the means to map and to represent relations within a conversational world" — specifically, the discussions ongoing since 1969 in and around Art & Language's journal *Art-Language*, which were then at a crossroads.<sup>117</sup> In England, where the conceptualization and creation of *Index 01* largely took place, 1971 was an eventful year for Art & Language. Harrison, who as a critic, curator, and editor of *Studio International*, had been an avid champion of conceptual art, assumed a role as "General Editor" of *Art-Language*. Also that year, Coventry College of Art cancelled the "Art Theory" course that Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, and Michael Baldwin developed and dismissed Bainbridge and Baldwin from the faculty. This course had encouraged art students to write, and several of their texts found their way into *Art-Language*, including

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<sup>116</sup> The most extensive treatment of this work is William Wood, *We Are a Cell Aren't We?: Art & Language and the Documenta Index*, unpublished master's thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1992.

<sup>117</sup> Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 63. On Art & Language and indexing, see the chapter "Indexes and Other Figures," pp. 63-81.

some by Philip Pilkington and David Rushton, who continued to participate in Art & Language after the cancellation of Art Theory. These changes and shakeups, coupled with the extension of Art & Language into New York over the preceding two years, left the collective unsure of its status, and *Index 01* provided an opportunity for reflection on identity and direction.

*Index 01* itself is an installation that consists of eight filing cabinets and 48 photostats. At *Documenta*, it was exhibited in a room of its own in the Museum Fredericianum with the filing cabinets placed atop four grey pedestals arranged in a square and the photostats pasted to the walls in a grid pattern. The filing cabinets contain texts written or published by Art & Language, while the photostats reproduce a series of charts that trace relations of compatibility, incompatibility, and non-relation between the texts. In Kassel, Art & Language circulated a two-sided poster entitled *Documenta Memorandum (Indexing)/Alternate Map for Documenta (Based on Citation A)*, published by Paul Maenz, Art & Language's dealer in Cologne, and it contains, on the recto, a text about indexing and, on the verso, a more condensed index that retraces the relations between the texts in the cabinets. The indexing procedure, in both cases, shows how the texts are, via the photostats and poster, concatenated — a favorite term of Art & Language's — in order to develop new insights out of old work in much the same way that the index to a book enables the making of connections within the book to which it is an index that might not occur otherwise by gathering proximally information that is dispersed throughout a text or body of texts. Art & Language's understanding of indexing derives equally from readings in library and information science on the one hand and linguistics and philosophy of language on the other. As future Art & Language projects reveal, both senses of the index — keywords and searching in the former discourse and indicating and referencing in the latter — play important roles.



The name under which Art & Language presented *Index 01* — “Art & Language Institute” — was not used again, but its significance for Art & Language is key. In 1971, Mel Ramsden, having returned briefly to his native England from New York, participated in a series of Art & Language meetings at which it was decided that, in the future, all work by participants in the collective would appear under a common name. Previously, when Art & Language exhibited, the names of individual artists were usually attributed to specific works, but, for *Documenta* and all future exhibitions, it was decided that only the Art & Language name would be used, and the Art & Language Institute was the first time this collective authorship was enforced. The individual names of all the collective’s participants were, however, also indicated in the entryway to the gallery in which *Index 01* was exhibited as well as in the exhibition catalogue, all not all of them necessarily contributed substantively to the piece. Those names are: Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin, Ian Burn, Charles Harrison, Harold Hurrell, Joseph Kosuth, Philip Pilkington, Mel Ramsden, and David Rushton. Ironically, given this new interest in collective authorship, the invitation to exhibit at *Documenta* was initially extended to Kosuth as an individual rather than Art & Language as a group, and Kosuth maneuvered to include his colleagues in the exhibition.<sup>118</sup>

That *Index 01* was presented as a “*Survey by*” indicates two further important features of the work. First, it is a “survey,” an overview of Art & Language’s writing and publishing activities to that point. In one sense, no new work is presented, only a reorganization of past work. In another sense, the new work is the reorganization of past work, which is what is

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<sup>118</sup> On Kosuth’s role in the exhibition of *Index 01*, see Joseph Kosuth “Writing and the Play of Art,” *Kunst und Museenjournal* 3, no. 4 (1992): pp. 30-36 as well as Harrison’s response on p. 36 of the same journal and Kosuth’s further reply in *Kunst und Museenjournal* 3, no. 6 (1992): pp. 25-26.

presented, and *Index 01* oscillates between these two states, leaving audiences free to treat it either as an opportunity to investigate old work by Art & Language that they may not have seen or as a chance to consider the elaborate organizational scheme Art & Language employed — or some combination of the two. Second, *Index 01* is “by” Art & Language, which indicates their role in organizing their previous work into this new form of display. That Art & Language functioned as their own curators testifies to their interest in assessing what, to that point, they had done, presumably, as Harrison indicates in referring to *Index 01* as a “map,” in order to chart a new course for the group. In a somewhat literal turn, it was precisely indexing itself that became the main course for Art & Language activity from this point forward, particularly in England but also, for a time, in New York as well. Though Baldwin provided the impetus for this shift in the collective’s practice, and he continued to lead indexing efforts in England, Ramsden, who assisted with the assembly of the work while in England, returned to New York intent on pursuing further indexing work there. Despite the transatlantic interest in indexing within Art & Language, the manner in which the collective’s two sections pursued this interest differed in significant ways, as two divergent approaches to organizing the group’s activities emerged and, eventually, clashed. In England, the formal and logical aspects of concatenating material took precedence and became increasingly elaborate, but in New York, an entirely distinct method developed: relatively simplistic and intuitive indexing techniques held sway, and priority was given to addressing the necessarily social process of generating new content to subject to concatenation.

The New York section’s approach to sociality derives from their established interest in the philosophy of science and their previous efforts to model their practice of art after the ways that scientists conduct research. The work of Imre Lakatos proved particularly influential on their

indexing projects. Lakatos' influence is already emerging in the second version of *Comparative Models*, the last major work by Art & Language's New York section prior to their turn to indexing. In a mockup of the work, there is a sentence removed from subsequent drafts of the textual component of the work that reads, "An Art & Language 'programme' may be developed non-paradigmatically — issuing from open pluralistic and alternate generating procedures."<sup>119</sup> This sentence, which also draws on Thomas S. Kuhn's conception of scientific paradigms and Paul Feyerabend's advocacy for the advantages of maintaining plurality of epistemological alternatives, involves the notion of a "scientific research programme," which Lakatos theorizes at length.<sup>120</sup>

By Lakatos' definition, a scientific research programme "consists of methodological rules: some tell us what paths of research to avoid (*negative heuristics*), and others what paths to pursue (*positive heuristics*)."<sup>121</sup> A negative heuristic is the "hard core" of a research programme:

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<sup>119</sup> Michael Corris Archive, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2003.M.32–Corris, Box 1, Folder 14.

<sup>120</sup> Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91-196, reprinted in Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes: Philosophical Papers Volume 1*. John Worrall and Gregory Currie, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 8-102. All citations are from the former edition.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 132. The mathematician George Pólya wrote the classic treatment of heuristics. His 1945 book *How to Solve It* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) theorizes the value of heuristic methods and presents a range of examples for students of mathematics. Heuristics is an ancient field of study (its chief exponent is the third or fourth century CE Greek mathematician Pappas). Pólya characterizes heuristics as the study of "the methods and rules of discovery and invention" (112). Lakatos uses the term in more or less this way, and he argues for science as an experiential, trial-and-error, ad hoc deployment of heuristic methods. Art & Language's understanding of heuristics also derives from their reading of Marx W. Wartofsky's "Metaphysics as Heuristic for Science" (1965) in *Models: Representation and the Scientific Understanding* (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Reidel, 1979), pp. 40-89.

those methodological rules that are not to be challenged through experimentation.<sup>122</sup> They are axiomatic and taken for granted. Accompanying these is a “protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses which has to bear the brunt of tests and get adjusted and re-adjusted, or even completely replaced, to defend the thus-hardened core.”<sup>123</sup> This “protective belt” is the positive heuristic of the research programme.<sup>124</sup> Testing this second set of methodological rules through experimentation is precisely what suggests avenues for continued research, and it is through challenges to the positive heuristic that scientific discovery occurs and knowledge grows. The success of a research programme is judged not by its irrefutability or its consistency but rather by whether or not the process of testing its positive heuristic leads to a “progressive problemshift” or a “degenerating problemshift.”<sup>125</sup>

The research programme, like Kuhn’s account of the paradigm, attempts to represent of the structure of scientific research. However, where Kuhn requires that the framework in which research is conducted must be abandoned in the face of a persistent anomaly, Lakatos allows for inconsistencies, difficulties, and outright falsehoods within research programmes, and he suggests that practitioners often persevere in spite of them. Where Kuhn would expect a scientific revolution to occur, Lakatos contends that scientists often continue to pursue research

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 133. Lakatos speaks of a research programme’s negative heuristic as that towards which the *modus tollens*, or the denial of the consequent (rendered in symbolic logic: if P, then Q; ~Q; therefore, ~P) is not to be directed. He gives the example of Newton’s three laws of dynamics and law of gravitation as an example of the negative heuristics of classical physics.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>124</sup> In the case of Newton, Lakatos gives the statement “the planets are essentially gravitating spinning-tops of roughly spherical shape” as an example of a positive heuristic claim, generated out of the laws of dynamics and gravitation, stated in the form of a “‘metaphysical’ principle” (Ibid, p. 137). Unlike Newton’s negative heuristics, which cannot be transgressed while maintaining the integrity of the Newtonian research programme, this statement is open to refutation (for example, research eventually shows that, in addition to gravitation, magnetic fields also influence the motion of planets).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

that stands on shaky ground so long as progressive problemshifts remain a viable outcome.<sup>126</sup> Accordingly, Lakatos writes, “We may appraise research programmes, even after their ‘elimination’, for their *heuristic power*: how many new facts did they produce, how great was their capacity to explain ‘their refutations in the course of their growth’?”<sup>127</sup>

Art & Language never go so far as to formalize a negative heuristics as such, however Lakatos’ ideas about pursuing research in the face of obstacles appealed to them tremendously, especially as the collective’s New York section grew larger and the diversity of viewpoints within the group presented difficulties about how to continue working together. By 1973, Art & Language’s New York section began to take on the size and shape of a genuine community. Eight people in New York participated in the collective’s projects that year: Ian Burn, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Joseph Kosuth, Michael Krugman, Andrew Menard, Mel Ramsden, and Terry Smith. Krugman’s involvement would prove brief. Heller and Menard, however, were heavily involved in the projects of 1973 and continued to participate through to the dissolution of the New York group. Both were students at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and they came to Art & Language’s attention after defending the group’s work in *Artforum*.<sup>128</sup> Entitled “Kozloff: Criticism in Absentia,” their article condemns Max Kozloff’s dismissal of conceptual art in his

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<sup>126</sup> Lakatos cites two examples that, in spite of false negative heuristics, nevertheless produced progressive problemshifts and made major scientific contributions: William Prout, whose (incorrect) hypothesis that all atoms are composed of hydrogen atoms led to new discoveries about atomic structure, and Niels Bohr, whose work on light emission proceeded from an inconsistent set of methodological rules but nevertheless led to an improved model of the atom. See Ibid, p. 138-154 for Lakatos’ comments on Prout and Bohr.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 137. The phrase in quotation marks is Lakatos’ citation of one of his own earlier essays.

<sup>128</sup> Preston Heller and Andrew Menard, “Kozloff: Criticism in Absentia,” *Artforum* 12, no. 6 (February 1973): pp. 32-36.

essay “The Trouble with Art as Idea” on the grounds of its author’s allegedly naïve empiricism — a criticism that Art & Language also made.<sup>129</sup>

With their newly enlarged ranks, Art & Language embarked on a project that subsequently provided the raw material for an index called *Blurting in A&L*. Each week over the course of several months, the participants in the project met to circulate amongst themselves short texts they had written. The texts concern a wide range of topics, though the question of Art & Language’s relationship to the art world is never far from consideration. The texts comment on one another and build to form an elaborate web of interconnected annotations in which Art & Language’s standing interest in annotation as a literary technique is redirected toward their own discourse, creating a dissonant feedback in which the group’s antagonism, directed inward, becomes the dominant characteristic of their work and their chief means of situating themselves collectively. Though Art & Language’s language can be idiosyncratic, the project aimed not to develop a cultish insularity but to bring the participants into discussions with one another so that their individual assumptions and ideological baggage would come to the surface where it could be examined, transformed, jettisoned, or exchanged for other beliefs and ideas in order to keep the collective project of working together collaboratively moving forward.

When this project — sometimes referred to as “the annotations,” though it was never given a formal name or title — came to a rather abrupt halt after about six months of steady annotating, the result was a typescript of several hundred pages, of which there is no definitive or authoritative version. Each individual annotation is a page or two in length and bears the initials of its author followed by a unique number as well as an indication of the other annotations to

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<sup>129</sup> For Kozloff’s essay, see “The Trouble with Art-as-Idea,” *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (September 1972): pp. 33-37. For Art & Language’s response to it, see the second version of *Comparative Models* (discussed in Chapter 1).

which it is itself an annotation, and this forms an ad hoc index-in-process. All totaled, roughly 120 annotations comprise the work, and most participants submitted between 15 and 25 unique texts. For example, the manuscript page headed “AM 12 c.f. IB 10” may be read “Andrew Menard’s twelfth annotation, referring to Ian Burn’s tenth annotation.” “TS 7,” in turn, refers to both “AM 12” and “IB 10” as well as “MR 12,” “PH 15,” and “MK 5.” In this way, the annotations build upon one another, forming chains and clusters of varying length and density. *Index 01* had drawn on the large body of texts that Art & Language had already written to create interconnections. Lacking such a corpus from which to draw, Art & Language’s New York section created a sui generis web of ideas, proposals, and counterproposals that develop, criticize, and connect one another.

In a document circulated internally within the group in the aftermath of the annotation project, Ramsden invokes “pandemonium,” a term he introduced into Art & Language’s discussions, as well as the preceding Art & Language coinage “going-on,” to discuss the significance of the annotations as a means of moving beyond the group’s earlier practice of writing essays for *Art-Language*:

In the Annotations, the pandemonium, replacing the earlier analytic “insights,” was most important because it was constituted through conduct. It wasn’t existentially alien to the NYAL situation, which is what I felt by this time the essay writing had become. We replaced refinement, improvement, the warding off [of] anomalies, with praxis, the strong possibility of confusion, contradiction, living with the difficulties, it became a “classroom situation” — we directed our

activities toward a community of enquirers in which all share and all participate.

We constitute going-on through praxis (the Annotations).<sup>130</sup>

Pandemonium was dually purposed according to Ramsden. It not only gave the section in New York a distinct way to work that provided them a measure of independence from their counterparts in England, it also provided them a strategy for critically engaging the art world. As Ramsden wrote, “Pandemonium in the way we internally abrasively interact, and pandemonium in the relation between us and the culture.”<sup>131</sup>

The content of the annotations is as complicated and interwoven as the concept of pandemonium and an unrelenting desire to “go-on” imply. Among the topics discussed are Art & Language’s new conception of themselves as researchers developing a learning situation for themselves through the use of heuristics; how they are to proceed with this work; how it squares with the current status of art and the art world, including the linguistic gulf that Art & Language perceive between themselves and other artists, especially painters; as well as the implications of Art & Language’s borrowings from extra-artistic disciplines. In an important set of the annotations about their avid interdisciplinarity, which spills over the boundaries of the art world and treats the philosophy of science, sociology, and other disciplines as sources for appropriating concepts and conceptual frameworks, and at one point Ramsden hypothesizes that, as a result of these borrowings, works such as the annotation project are “only ad hoc stratagems, heuristic devices” that “do not stand-in-line with the developing historical stylistic of 20<sup>th</sup> century Western Art” because their value is less as “products” or “pieces of paper” than as aids in a process of

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<sup>130</sup> Mel Ramsden, “Concerning the Annotations,” document circulated internally within Art & Language, dated 1974, unpaginated. Available online at: <[http://blurring-in.zkm.de/e/conc\\_annot](http://blurring-in.zkm.de/e/conc_annot)>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, n.p.



“proceeding” with such activities as “reading, conversing, talking etc” that are not necessarily artistic.<sup>132</sup> Of all the statements in the annotations, these are some of the most provocative because of what they suggest about possible identities Art & Language might assume.

Taking Heller’s first annotation as a point of departure, it is possible to trace how the participants in Art & Language develop one another’s ideas in their search for knowledge and arrive at the conclusion they reach. Heller begins by outlining a program for Art & Language’s new undertaking that subsequent annotators take up and transform:

We seem to be faced with the task of starting/continuing the refutation of other theories though not so much through direct attack as through non-interest. Our own theories, however, are and will be subject to constant dissection and should be understood never to be secure — there seems to be no end in that theories may always be refuted.<sup>133</sup>

In his second annotation, Menard responds to Heller’s first annotation (as well as the first annotations of Burn and Ramsden as well as his own first). He concurs with Heller that Art & Language’s activity, at least for the time being, “will be self-referential” and oriented by “our desire to create an optimal speaker-hearer (audience) context.”<sup>134</sup> Within this space, he proposes, the aim of Art & Language work should be to facilitate “recognition of each individual’s, as well as the group’s, presuppositions.”<sup>135</sup> Smith responds to both of these annotations (as well as others) in his fourth annotation. He suggests that the group “altogether forget that we are acting

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<sup>132</sup> Art & Language, typescript of the annotations, MR 18. All citations from this work are taken from a manuscript copy in the papers of Terry Smith, Pittsburgh. Because the text is not paginated, citations provide the individual annotations designated by letters and numbers in lieu of conventional page numbers.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, PH 1.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, AM 2.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, AM 2.

in an art context” or at the very least “to reject any obligations to connect what we are doing to whatever notions we have about where art is at.”<sup>136</sup> Only by letting “our artworld connections lapse” will it be possible to “avoid adopting either ‘within art’ or ‘anti-art’ postures.”<sup>137</sup> He concludes, through reference to the concept of an “eventual context of use” that Burn advances in his first annotation, with the hope that “our work will ‘eventually’ suggest its own ‘context of use’.”<sup>138</sup> In Heller’s twelfth annotation, which comments on Smith’s fourth, Heller takes issue with Smith’s idea, asking “why leave the club, why not change it?”<sup>139</sup> He continues,

I do not think the entailment will foster either a “within art or anti-art” posture but maybe an art-critical posture. How are we really different from any other persons attempting to be “artists”. At any rate I fail to see how our/any work can suggest its own “context of use”. It seems as though someone will have to make that suggestion.<sup>140</sup>

Over the course of these annotations, something like a problemshift occurs as Art & Language recognize an increasing degree of complexity about their relationships to one another and to the art world and what this entails for their future work.

Art & Language’s awareness of their inextricability from the art world emerges gradually as the annotating process proceeds and is particularly evident in Ramsden’s contributions. His tenth annotation also departs from Heller’s first, and in it he contends that Heller’s ideas about refuting past theories have “a lot of policemen of the art-world connotations about them.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, TS 4.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, TS 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, TS 4.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, PH 12.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, PH 12.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, MR 10.

Instead, he proposes, “we might simply ask for these theories — or better, ideologies — to be regarded as problematical.”<sup>142</sup> He goes on to explain that “The formalized ‘language of art’ with its constituent ‘artists’, ‘display places’, ‘ideologies’ etc. need not be refuted, only seen as problematical,” and, moreover, that “The vantage point from which these may be viewed as problematical could be that of our particular ‘life-world’,” which he qualifies as “The ‘trivialities’ of New York circa the 1970s, Art & Language New York and England, recent contemporary art, Leo Castelli, The Bowery, a community of interested persons/a community of uninterested ones, them/us etc. etc.”<sup>143</sup> Ramsden then explicitly links Art & Language activity to the world:

Speaking of problematic Art & Language is probably to refer more to practico-social than the theoretical. That is, you speak of the ideological or the ‘lived’ relationship between ‘our work’ and ‘the world’. This means you don’t consider your ‘work’ outside of the problematic, or outside a relation with the world.<sup>144</sup>

Again, in his twelfth annotation, Ramsden reasserts the importance of this idea:

We should have done this 2 or 3 years ago. It is one way of preventing that split between ‘talking in the pub’, ‘reading’, and ‘work’. I mean the split is artificial, stylistic, and harmful. You must see ‘talk’, ‘reading’, ‘work’ as essential constituents on the same map, it is silly to formalize only a part and leave the rest tacit.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid, MR 10.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, MR 10.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, MR 12.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, MR 12.

The cessation of annotating shortly after the coinage of “problematic Art & Language” and the new social awareness it entails corresponds to increased attempts to connect Art & Language’s work to an audience larger than the immediate participants in the group.

The annotations functioned for their writers as a learning environment in which they could collectively work out their identity. The final product was, compared to this active social environment, a rather lifeless document that represented pandemonium but did little in the way of perpetuating it. Shortly after the process of annotating stopped, however, a new project was already underway, which reconfigured the text of the annotations into a more open work that presents readers with situations not dissimilar to those Art & Language encountered during the process of annotating, creating, even for an audience of one, a decidedly social situation. This was to be a work that would welcome the audience into Art & Language’s way of working as fellow participants in their project. Entitled *Blurting in A&L* (though also referred to as the Handbook), the work is an artist’s book from 1973 that contains both an introductory essay by Ramsden and Corris as well as 408 “blurts” — short statements presented without much immediate contextualization — each extracted from the annotations and reorganized into a new whole.<sup>146</sup>

Co-published by Art & Language Press and the Nova Scotia College of Art, *Blurting in A&L* is a soft-cover, staple-bound pamphlet 9” x 6” inches and 92 pages long. On its front cover, printed diagonally from lower left to upper right, is a block of text that serves as a preface to the

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<sup>146</sup> Art & Language, *Blurting in A&L* (New York and Halifax: Art & Language Press and Nova Scotia College of Art, 1973). All citations from *Blurting in A&L* preserve the original typography where possible. The full text of *Blurting in A&L* is available online along with related resources organized by Thomas Dreher at <<http://blurting-in.zkm.de/>>.

contents inside. It describes the book as “an index of blurts and their concatenations (the Handbook),” which, moreover,

constitutes a problematic; that is, you can’t (at least not without deliberation) ignore possible pathways without losing embeddedness (ideolects); deliberation (here, the issue of going-on becomes a self-conscious construction for the reader) admits broader reflection of a context of our/your/other activities: namely, the structure of our/your language/culture and (the prospect of) revisability of our/your language/culture.<sup>147</sup>

The use of a forward slash to simultaneously separate and join the words “our” and “your” as “our/your” implicates the user as a participant, and this helps to resolve the issue of Art & Language discourse remaining closed to non-participants by situating the work’s impact within the broader “language/culture” that Art & Language shares with its audience. It also indicates that the audience for Art & Language work might extend beyond the confines of the art world into the larger fields of language and culture. That the work was published as a mass-produced and inexpensive artist’s book — a first for the New York section — indicates the desire to reach a larger audience, and co-publishing with the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, at the time an important press for artist’s books, enabled wider distribution than had previously been the case for Art & Language work.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, front cover.

<sup>148</sup> On the Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Press of NSCAD: A Brief Incomplete History and Its Future Books” in Garry N. Kennedy, ed. *NSCAD: The Nova Scotia College of Art & Design* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1982), pp. 64-75. On the close relations between the Nova Scotia College of Art and conceptual artists, see Bruce Barber, ed. *Conceptual Art: The NSCAD Connection: 1967-1973* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 2001).

The editorial process by which the annotations became *Blurting in A&L* was largely the work of Ramsden and Corris, although the process was discussed openly with the group during an April 13, 1973 discussion at which seven of the eight participants were present, Corris being the only absentee. The transcript of this meeting, like most transcripts of Art & Language discussions, does not indicate who is speaking so as to downplay the importance of individual contribution in favor of collective and collaborative process, though it is safe to infer that the propositions about how to proceed with the editorial process are Ramsden's given the leading role he played in authoring the introduction and editing the work. He proposes, "we were thinking that perhaps what we would do would be not to make an index and include the annotations but instead we would compile a kind of glossary."<sup>149</sup> Ramsden further suggests that "we go through the annotations/transcript and we pick out key words and phrases" that would then serve as the basis for organizing an alphabetical list of the appearance of these terms in the text of the annotations.<sup>150</sup> The final result would be "a kind of combination glossary/dictionary/vocabulary list."<sup>151</sup>

Ultimately, when Ramsden and Corris edited *Blurting in A&L*, they devised 108 "subject-headings or categories" drawn from the texts into which they sorted each of the blurts they excerpted from the annotations.<sup>152</sup> They also created two "arrays" for each blurt: an "→" array that links each blurt to other blurts that are directly connected to it, and an "&" array that links each blurt to other blurts that are more loosely connected or part of its broader context. As Ramsden and Corris explain,

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<sup>149</sup> From a transcript of an Art & Language conversation dated April 13, 1973, Terry Smith papers, Pittsburgh, p. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>152</sup> Art & Language, *Blurting in A&L*, p. 2.

After our 400 odd blurts there are two possible relations to, potentially, every other single blurt. ... The first relation is a ‘→’. There is also a ‘&’. ... If you go from one blurt and you read into the ‘→’ array then you are proceeding with a strong context. If you go into the ‘&’ array then you are going into a weaker context.<sup>153</sup>

While these categories and arrays impose a structure on the blurts and how the reader is meant to read them, Ramsden and Corris stress that “We could just as well call the 108 subject-headings ‘user oriented landmarks’.”<sup>154</sup> Like landmarks guiding a traveler, the subject-headings direct the reader through *Blurting in A&L* by offering a sense of direction without prescribing a path to take or stipulating much detail about what is to be found at the destination, and it is here that *Blurting in A&L* most noticeably differs from the annotations in terms of structure. The annotations are organized as a sequence of texts written in a chronological order, which the reader is to follow in order to track the development of Art & Language’s conversations. By contrast, *Blurting in A&L* is not organized sequentially; the alphabetical ordering of the blurts according to subject-headings is arbitrary, and the reader is free to pick any of the 408 blurts as a valid starting point for engaging the text. As Ramsden and Corris put the matter, “There are no strictly determined pathways, all you get is a set of possible next steps.”<sup>155</sup> To read *Blurting in A&L* is, then, to create rather than trace pathways by reading blurts directly connected by the “→” symbol. When readers desire to exit the pathway they have created, they read into the broader context of the “&” symbol, which terminates one pathway and opens another.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-2.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

The blurts are laid out according to a formula that provides rules for reading through them. The fifty-fifth blurt, on the subject of the art world, contains three sentences drawn from the annotations (where they were not necessarily authored by the same person nor did they necessarily appear consecutively) followed by two arrays indicating directions for further reading:

55     ART WORLD Critic, author, artist, enquirer, audience, should have the same status/responsibilities. We still have the old ‘meaningless’ art blik about everything following from the natural creative magic of the artist. You can’t accept the artist/critic distinction anymore than you can glibly accept the theory/practice distinction.

→ Collaboration 93, 94; Conversation 110; Meaning 235; Problematic 284, 286; Proceeding 292; Responsibility 311;

& Ambiguity 15; A priori 27; Art-criticism 39; Art-enquiry 46; Artist 48; Context 105; Conversational matrix 117; Ideology 170; Trivialities 369; Work 395;<sup>156</sup>

The content of the blurt is, like almost all of the other blurts, a short, declarative statement. It is, according to Ramsden and Corris’s arrays, related to 18 other blurts. The reader who wishes to continue reading *Blurting in A&L* should (presuming he or she follows Art & Language’s instructions) select a blurt from one of these two arrays, turn to the appropriate page, read that blurt, and repeat the process again for as long as he or she desires. So, beginning from blurt number 55, one could choose to enter the “→” array, select blurt number 94 and read:

94     COLLABORATION In many respects scientific information exchange and collaborative encounters provide us with an interesting alternative to the

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 30.



model of the art-world as it exists now. Rather than push the individual out of the picture, it provides a framework for maximum potential. De-personalization ought to be viewed as a reactionary fear about, rather than a product of, communal behavior.

→ Art criticism 39; Collaboration 92; Context 96, 102; Conversation 110; Conversation matrix 111, 112, 117; Individuality 178; Language 194; Language environment 201, 202; Learning 210, 215; Paradigm 259; Problematic 282; Work 375, 381;

& Ambiguity 8; Autonomy 1; Belief 65; Blurting 77; Context 99; Conversation 108, 109; Ideology 170; Intersubjectivity 188; Philosophy 264; Pragmatics 277, 278; Psychological 302; Semantic field 321; Stylistics 331; Work 394;<sup>157</sup>

One may continue from there and subject these blurts to a process of testing and evaluation not dissimilar to that undertaken by Art & Language in the process of drafting the annotations. These blurts are not definitive statements of Art & Language's position on the art world or collaboration but serve as part of the "protective belt" or "positive heuristic" that defends the "negative heuristic" of Art & Language's research programme, which is now open to broader participation. Depending on the pathways one constructs while reading through *Blurting in A&L*, any given blurt may appear either valid or not because the context in which it is read, that is, the sequence of blurts that precede it, changes; moreover, its inflection will change according to the this context. Indeed, by definition, blurts are statements that are unable to articulate the context in which they are uttered but rather rely on the interpretative capacity of hearers to provide such a context. As Ramsden and Corris note, "Much of this material will be incomprehensible at a

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

glance. In order to get anything out of the material you would have to activate some of the potential pathways. Embeddedness becomes crucial.”<sup>158</sup> The process of reading and constructing pathways in order to embed the blurts in contexts that give them meaning may continue indefinitely. Tellingly, each of the blurts ends with a semi-colon, implying, as that punctuation mark does, the joining of complete thoughts that are separate but linked. The schematic layout of each blurt, which links it to other blurts via an elaborate structure of numbers and symbols, recalls a thesaurus, another “handbook” that a reader may explore endlessly, linking one word to the next, comparing them, and gaining a better understanding of “our/your language/culture.”

When a reader reads the blurts according to Ramsden and Corris’ instructions, as the cover of *Blurting in A&L* states, “the issue of going-on becomes a self-conscious construction for the reader.”<sup>159</sup> This idea is further emphasized in the introductory essay: “It’s about constituting going-on, not describing going on.”<sup>160</sup> The decisions facing Art & Language while drafting the annotations now become those of the reader of *Blurting in A&L*. Of the former work, Ramsden and Corris recall, “Looking at those annotations we wondered ‘do I want to respond to this one?’, ‘How will I respond to this?’, ‘How will I go on?’, ‘Do I want to go on?’, ‘Will I go on in this way?’, ‘Will I react against this?’.”<sup>161</sup> Now, *Blurting in A&L* “makes reading explicit. It means that after reading a given blurt you have to ask yourself ‘How do I go on?’, ‘Do I in fact want to go on?’ . . . The problem it shows is ‘How do we, all of us, go on?’”<sup>162</sup> To read *Blurting in A&L* is, then, to partake of the very same activities that drive Art & Language’s practice. It is to become a quasi-participant in Art & Language, to straddle the line between “our/your.” The

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, front cover.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

deliberations Art & Language faced when creating the annotations, which could not become real for the reader of that text, as the reader could only trace Art & Language's steps, "become real for the user of this handbook."<sup>163</sup>

By constituting the reader of *Blurring in A&L* as a quasi-participant, Art & Language insist on a degree of continuity between what happens within their group and "our/your language/culture." In the introductory essay, Ramsden and Corris speak of the annotations being "concerned with developing a teaching/learning, even social environment for eight individuals, all with a degree of shared interests and information."<sup>164</sup> With *Blurring in A&L*, they open this environment up to broader participation by inviting their audience to further develop their research programme, and Ramsden and Corris even consider the possibility that Art & Language seek converts to their way of working:

The generative potential of A&L has to do with practice. Maybe it might open an area of alternate potentials for those outside of A&L. The goal isn't to convert hoards to 'theoretical art' and similar nonsense, the goal isn't stylistic. All this means is that we don't offer a model (paradigm) for people to shift to; A&L is not an object of contemplation. The handbook isn't a model either. ... What's very important now is that only the existence of an argumentation that is neither compelling nor arbitrary offers the exercise of reasonable choice. That means that A&L is neither a model nor an attempt to convert — but, importantly, a bit of both.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

This desire to find a larger audience for (and more participants in) Art & Language work is in tension with work that remains fundamentally concerned with discourse generated internally by the participants in Art & Language. This tension between internal structure and external relations would develop into a crucial point of contention between the Art & Language sections in New York and England, as the English section became increasingly concerned with internal issues while the New York section sought to expand outward.

Burn and Ramsden formalized their differences from the English section of Art & Language in an essay entitled “Problems of Art & Language Space” written not long after the exhibition of *Index 01* at Documenta and published in *Art-Language*. In it, Burn and Ramsden highlight the need to pay more attention to external contexts for Art & Language work, particularly in indexing projects. After noting that indexing initially functioned in *Index 01* as a way to assess “the overall conversations in and around this journal,” they call for further explorations outside the group’s internal context:

But we are just as concerned with these conversations as a framework and how they fit together with normative art-activities (painting, sculpture and so-called ‘post-object’ art) and the writings concerning those activities. But more than that, we are concerned with how this framework fits into the expansive network of other frameworks and disciplines and activities.<sup>166</sup>

The indexing project would, as defined initially by *Index 01*, be unable to go beyond the first of these three explorations, and near the end of the article, Burn and Ramsden suggest that a more sociological approach to Art & Language and their contexts is needed:

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<sup>166</sup> Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, “Problems of Art & Language Space,” *Art-Language* 2, no. 3 (September 1973): p. 53.

The notion of communities has only recently been researched by sociologists. A view of the history of art based on the changing ambitions due to community ideologies should be revealing. What A&L is doing is making this community space explicit — deliberately social and institutionally based — intersubjective rather than subjective.<sup>167</sup>

This intersubjectivity took on two forms for the New York section: both the internal intersubjectivity of the group and the external intersubjective contexts, artistic and otherwise, in which the group participates.

Despite their reservations about the project, indexing nevertheless provided important occasions for the Art & Language section in New York to collaborate with their English counterparts. *Index 002 Bxal* (1973) is one such example. Initiated by the English section in response to *Blurting in A&L* (“Bxal” is shorthand for “blurting in Art & Language”), *Index 002 Bxal* came together after Baldwin and Pilkington of the English section visited New York in 1973. Harrison describes the work as follows:

A wall-sized printed text was sent from England, spaced out so that a range of possible relations of ‘going-on’ or ‘concatenory expressions’ could be penciled in beneath the lacunae. These were to be chosen from a formalized set of types of expressions (or possible relations of concatenation between individual lexical items) which were specified on printed forms accompanying the main text.<sup>168</sup>

The English section established an extremely complex set of logical rules for the New York section to follow when concatenating the “expressions.” Unlike *Blurting in A&L*, which utilized

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, pp. 70-71.

<sup>168</sup> Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, p. 100.

an intuitive, straightforward indexing procedure to place emphasis on the content of the blurts and their possible applications to the world, including the art world, the concern of *Index 002 Bxal* is squarely on the formal structure for concatenating them, on the internal structures capable of being generated between the statements rather than on external applicability. This structure became so intricate that a supplementary text called *Handbook(s) to Going-on* appeared as an issue of *Art-Language* to further explicate the work.<sup>169</sup>

*Index 002 Bxal* was shown in November of 1973 at John Weber Gallery, which represented Art & Language in the United States for most of the 1970s. The gallery was located in SoHo at 420 West Broadway in a building that also housed Leo Castelli Gallery, Sonnabend Gallery, and André Emmerich Gallery. This was the first space dedicated to exhibiting contemporary art in what would become, until the rise of Chelsea in the 1980s, the major contemporary art district in New York and, as a result, the absolute center of the art world during this period.<sup>170</sup> Given this, it is peculiar that the English section chose to exhibit there a work of a particularly insular character that was designed more for the internal use of the group than for whatever audience came to the gallery. Precisely this sort of contradiction led the New York section away from the indexing project and into various kinds of conflict and disagreement with the English section over the social dimension of Art & Language work in New York. For the New York section, the demands of working at the center of the art world did not allow hermetic work like *Index 002 Bxal*.

In early 1974, the New York section continued to work on indexing projects. They completed one and left another unfinished: *77 Sentences* (1974) was the work of Burn, Corris,

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<sup>169</sup> Art & Language, "Handbook(s) to Going-On," *Art-Language* 2, no. 4 (July 1974).

<sup>170</sup> On 420 West Broadway during this period, see *420 West Broadway at Spoleto Festival*, exhibition catalogue (San Nicolò, Spoleto: XV Festival dei due Mondi, 1972).

Heller, Menard, Ramsden, and Smith and was shown at Galleria Schema in Florence, and an untitled “workbook” developed by Corris and Menard that elaborates upon pathways and their construction was never fully realized.<sup>171</sup> The latter, an index conceived on the model of *Blurring in A&L* as a series of numbered passages linked by a series of concatenations, was to have been structured either as an 8 x 8 x 8 “matrix” of 512 blurts or as a 7 x 7 x 7 matrix of 343 blurts culled from a variety of texts previously written by Art & Language. *77 Sentences* followed more closely the model of *Index 002 Bxal*, using shorter statements developed for the occasion of the work. The process of concatenating these statements involved not only the group but also a number of people associated with Art & Language but who had not previously contributed directly to the group’s work: Karl Beveridge, Carole Condé, Paula Eck, Kathleen Mooney, and John Ruff. Together, they, along with the New York-based participants in Art & Language, filled in a worksheet concerning the 77 texts written specifically for the work. (Beveridge and Conde would soon join Art & Language.) The texts, printed on a long vertical panel, were exhibited along with the completed worksheet, which asked respondents to envision connections between the texts and develop ways of embedding them within one another.

Ultimately, the New York section’s interest in social subjects drew them away from the increasingly formal concerns of the indexing project. Around this time, acronyms begin to appear in the group’s writings to differentiate between the two sections: “ALUK,” “ALNY,” and several variants thereof. The transcript of an internal Art & Language discussion held in New York on April 6, 1973 contains a sketch of one way in which the New York section perceived

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<sup>171</sup> *77 Sentences* is reproduced in its entirety in Christian Schlatter, *Art Conceptuel Formes Conceptuelles: Conceptual Art and Conceptual Forms*. Exhibition catalogue (Paris: Galerie 1900 Δ 2000, 1990), pp. 130-135. Preparatory notes and materials for Corris’ workbook, including a mockup of the final work, are in the Michael Corris Archive, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2003.M.32–Corris, Boxes 3 and 4.

their difference from the English section, which has to do precisely with their position at the center of the social structure of the art world:

Andrew, what do you think is an important characteristic feature about being in NY?/ First of all, that NY tends to be much more intellectualized... Beyond that, the high level of competition ... large community of artists, you have a lot of people to talk to...communications./ [...] There's a heavy art-social scene.../ And it becomes very clear to see the institutionalized way it works here... Ya know what I mean? This would be a more sociological context than say (England) which is a more logical context... I don't mean that they are more logical, but this would be more sociological.../ Surely, we give the more anthropological, sociological descriptions of what's ever going on.../<sup>172</sup>

By the end of 1974, the sections of Art & Language in England and New York were working entirely independently of one another. The event that precipitated this split was the reception of the September 1974 issue of *Art-Language*, which was given over to a series of transcripts documenting conversations Burn, Ramsden, and Smith had between May and June of that year about “the problematicness of our situation.”<sup>173</sup> The title given to this project is “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” and its 39 short chapters include many evaluations of Art & Language's own projects, of which the discussants offer a generally low assessment. (Two more heavily edited and polished sections on Australia are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.) At one point,

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<sup>172</sup> From a transcript of an Art & Language conversation dated April 6, 1973, Terry Smith papers, Pittsburgh, p. 2. The speakers are not indicated in the original transcript, however changes between speakers are notated with a forward slash.

<sup>173</sup> Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, and Terry Smith, “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 1 (September 1974): p. 1. All citations from “Draft for an Anti-Textbook” preserve the original typography where possible.



someone recalls a proposal that, were Art & Language to have a retrospective exhibition (as had been suggested by Nicholas Logsdail, founder of the Lisson Gallery, which represented Art & Language in London), it might be organized as “a ‘history of failures’,” and failure is a repeated theme in “Draft for an Anti-Textbook.”<sup>174</sup> This negative appraisal, as Harrison notes, “was largely disregarded in England,” and “Draft for an Anti-Textbook” marks the point after which the split between the two Art & Language sections becomes irreparable.<sup>175</sup> A review of it in the next issue of *Art-Language* is entirely negative and dismissive.<sup>176</sup> It also opens up many of the directions that the New York section would explore until their dissolution in 1976, directions that saw Art & Language make markedly less explicit use of concepts from the philosophy of science as they deepened their reengagement with the art world.

Art & Language identify the root of what they perceive as their work’s failure in the impossibility of “‘making lucid’ the so-called ‘relationship’ to language, in any structural sense” owing to the fact that language is “something which can’t be tackled directly, it’s a matter of reflection... because we are already ‘in’ our language...”<sup>177</sup> They argue further that “Language has a hold on us,” which means that “there’s no way of standing off and getting, anthropologically, an overview.”<sup>178</sup> These claims about language are connected to a reassessment of audience, which proceeds through a critique of the concept of “ideal speakers.”<sup>179</sup> An ideal speaker or “ideal speaker-listener” is a central concept of Chomsky’s linguistics, which, in the first version of *Comparative Models*, Art & Language had invoked

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>175</sup> Harrison, p. 115.

<sup>176</sup> Art & Language, “Rambling: To Partial Correspondents,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): pp. 46-51.

<sup>177</sup> Burn, Ramsden, and Smith, “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” p. 42.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

while putting forward a conception of their work as a “model of competence” in opposition to the art world’s “model of performance.”<sup>180</sup> They reasserted this idea in the annotations, which began as an attempt to create an ideal speaker-listener environment for Art & Language. Chomsky uses the term to refer to a language user who is “unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of this language in actual performance.”<sup>181</sup> For such a speaker, competence in a language is enacted in every linguistic performance, that is to say, his or her use of language is a performance of total competence in that language, but this is never the case for actual speakers, all of whom are affected by the things that Chomsky brackets out of consideration in constructing his notion of an ideal speaker-listener. In acknowledging this, Art & Language admit that their claim to be competent language users is predicated on an idealized notion of language use that does not obtain outside of a conceptual framework used by linguists to think rather abstractly about language. In what Art & Language call the “pragmatic” circumstances of lived experience, there are no ideal speaker-hearers. Following from this realization, Art & Language also recognize any audience for whom they would work will likewise never be comprised of ideal speaker-listeners, and therefore failure is an implicit part of using language to relate to an audience.

In line with this assessment, the discussants posit the following hypothetical response to their conversation:

Assume all this chatter is published. People will probably read it and different things will interest different people for different reasons (maybe). Publishing this

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<sup>180</sup> See Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1965).

<sup>181</sup> Burn, Ramsden, and Smith, “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” p. 3.

assumes a potential of generalizing, bits may interest people who might be called 'members of the art-world' but the same and/or other bits may interest other people... that's all I want (and that's a lot)... it's not constructible set-theoretically, or it's misleading if it is, but it's encounterable.

Art & Language here acknowledge that there is no ideal audience for their work but rather a series of different perspectives brought to bear on it, and the art world is unavoidably amongst these, which means that Art & Language is "not above it" but "in it as well."<sup>182</sup> Despite this admission of their participation in the art world, they do not soften their assessment of it:

'The artworld' is a highly stressed rhetorical situation in which roles are contingently related to constantly shifting sets of audience values, procedures etc. The artist is the prime-mover, the artwork the life blood, the critic the catalyst, the dealer the distributor, the audience the lapping-it-up fodder of glorious 'art'...

I mean this model of the closed image of the artworld as a natural order where everybody has a role which fits together as in an interconnected organism is half our problem... it's what we're up against. It's easy to create another, more sinister picture: where the dealer is related to the stockbroker and the artist is related to the peddler.<sup>183</sup>

Regardless of whether the art world is deluded about the reality of its social role, and regardless of whether it functions as a mask for concealed economic realities, Art & Language recognize it as no less actually a part of their lives and themselves as no less a part of it.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

Such concerns are not altogether new for Art & Language, but what is new in “Draft for an Anti-Textbook” is their recognition that communicative difficulties and failures of language can become productive when made the subject of Art & Language’s work rather than being treated an impediment to it, and “Draft for an Anti-Textbook” indicates a change in direction toward the direct engagement with problems that arise in social settings mediated by language. In particular, it testifies to a gradual shift in the degree to which Art & Language understands itself: away from a formal organization toward a looser arrangement:

The idea of ‘collaboration’, if it ever worked with us, has certainly collapsed during the past couple of years into (vague) sociality. The problem with collaboration was the ‘we speak with one voice’ implications; sociality might be more like ‘I speak with many voices’... sociality would then be the inverse of collaboration.<sup>184</sup>

Once Art & Language begin to think of themselves as less strictly collective, the difference between the group and its social environment, including the art world, is less strictly maintainable. Such an idea had begun to emerge during the creation of the annotations, the group’s first attempt to actualize itself as an alternative to the art world, when “Any thought about the viability of a ‘controlled’ environment was explicitly exposed” and “all there was was some sense of social (group) obligation.”<sup>185</sup> Between the impossibility of controlling the group situation and the obligation to be social, there arose difficulties contextualizing statements and a concomitant “problem of not being able to distinguish ‘message’ from ‘noise’,” which led to the discovery of “a position of realizing points of view where anomalies are no longer anomalies...

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

the potentials of confusion... living with the difficulties... and how seemingly contradictory notions were no longer excludable.”<sup>186</sup> Or, in short, “The Annotations were a mess... in many different ways... especially some of the social problems which came up and have come up since.”<sup>187</sup>

In “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” Art & Language’s inwardness begins to reorient itself outward, and messiness is recuperated as a state that Art & Language can create to share and explore with their audiences. Pandemonium thus appears as an alternative to official language, bureaucracy, and the social roles that both of these enforce in the art world. One discussant proposes that “I don’t think there’s anywhere you ‘start’... you start in the middle, anywhere, not from ‘foundations’, not from a tabula rasa, but in a mess.”<sup>188</sup> Elsewhere, someone suggests that the critic Lucy Lippard’s mixed sentiments about Art & Language work are in fact an excellent beginning for mutual learning:

Lucy Lippard said she ‘enjoyed’ A&L but still didn’t understand it, which might show for her understanding is having an external view or overview, something we can’t provide... the best understanding she could have is to not-understand... not-understanding is ‘understanding’... the best purchase on us is a confusion about the work... at least that might be the beginning of ‘understanding’.<sup>189</sup>

The point at which a beneficial exchange between Art & Language and the art world may occur is here posited as the very point at which communication becomes impossible: a point of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>188</sup> Burn, Ramsden, and Smith, “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” p. 30.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, p. 89. Lippard included several works by Art & Language in her *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966-1972* (1973) (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997), and she would later participate in an Art & Language discussion in Australia during 1975.

“encounter” that does not proceed from understanding but confusion. “Draft for an Anti-Textbook” concludes with more remarks on encountering, including the important statement that “It doesn’t make any sense to conceive of the social/cultural situation except in terms of encounter.”<sup>190</sup> It is through encounters that Art & Language now conceive of their relations with one another and with others, encounters that are contingent and limited but also necessary for the transformation of social relations, and, after the publication of “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” the New York section begin to seek out more actively points of encounter with their audience, especially the art world.

After two years spent critiquing the art world from a constructed social position of imagined exteriority made possible by readings in the philosophy of science, Art & Language acknowledge in “Draft for an Anti-Textbook” that whatever gains they have made in pursuing such a position (and, in turning to the philosophy of science, they have indeed gained significant knowledge about social relations, group collaboration, structural transformation, and so on) are most useful when brought into more tangible relation with audiences, however uncomfortable such relations may be or become. Smith registered this need to reengage the art world in his 1974 *Artforum* article, not only by publishing in the magazine that two years prior Art & Language had severely criticized, but by acknowledging that a central paradox in Art & Language’s work to that point had been the fact that, despite striving to identify and overcome the limitations of the art world, the art world nevertheless had always been the main audience for Art & Language’s work: “The hoped-for public is something like ‘the general (intelligent) reading public — a reality to at least certain publishers. In practice, however, the immediate audience for

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

A&L work lies in the art world.”<sup>191</sup> After “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” the New York section becomes less and less satisfied with working for themselves or with making work available to an anonymous audience; to change “our/your language/culture,” it henceforth becomes necessary to socialize, not only within the confines of a collective body like Art & Language, however loosely such a group defines participation, but also with others outside that collective, and so, after 1974, the New York section, in contrast to their English counterparts, begin to actively seek out and work with their audience not only in New York but also in Australia and Yugoslavia. They return to the art world and make an audience-specific art.

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<sup>191</sup> Smith, p. 51.

### 3.0 AGAINST PROVINCIALISM

Among the subjects preoccupying Art & Language during the 1970s are the cultural politics of international relations. This interest is especially strong with those participants in Art & Language's New York section born outside the United States. Ian Burn and Terry Smith, both Australian, together with important contributions from Mel Ramsden, who is English, produced a series of texts on provincialism, cultural imperialism, and related topics that subsequently informed the short-lived Australian section of Art & Language and provided it with a theoretical platform for a series of exhibitions in Melbourne, Adelaide, and Auckland in 1975 and 1976 that address power imbalances in intercultural politics and endeavor to develop new approaches to internationalizing art and culture through less bureaucratic and institutionalized forms of socialization across national borders.

It is no accident that the Australians in Art & Language were so sensitive to these issues, as Australian intellectuals have reflected extensively on perceptions of their nation's cultural inferiority. In a 1950 essay, the Australian writer and critic A.A. Phillips coined the term "cultural cringe" to refer to the sense within Australia that culture produced by Australians did not compare favorably to European, especially British, culture:

We cannot shelter from invidious comparisons behind the barrier of a separate language; we have no long-established or interestingly different cultural tradition to give security and distinction to its interpreters; and the centrifugal pull of the



great cultural metropolises works against us. Above our writers — and other artists — looms the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon achievement. Such a situation almost inevitably produces the characteristic Australian Cultural Cringe.<sup>192</sup>

While not properly a theory of provincialism, Phillips' account of cultural cringe set the tone for the coming discourse on that topic by identifying the importance of the distant metropolis for writers and artists in Australia.

Provincialism as such finds its first strong articulation in the work of the Australian art historian Bernard Smith, who, in 1971, characterized “the European art of Australia,” as distinct from its Aboriginal art, to be “a provincial art carried on for almost two centuries now in a south-east Asian situation far from such metropolitan sources as London, Paris and, more recently, New York.”<sup>193</sup> Like Phillips, Smith calls attention to the distance between Australia and metropolitan centers, the main effect of which is “a time-lag in the reception, absorption and florescence of styles generated in those distant metropolitan centres.”<sup>194</sup> Given that this metropolitan art claimed significance for itself on the basis of stylistic modernism and its avant-gardism, an Australian “time-lag” ensured that Australians who wanted to participate in metropolitan styles would always find themselves on the sidelines as imitators of the metropolis, never properly modern, and certainly not avant-garde. For Smith, Australia's escape from its

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<sup>192</sup> A.A. Phillips, “The Cultural Cringe” in Ann Stephen, et al., eds., *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2006), p. 624.

<sup>193</sup> Bernard Smith with Terry Smith, *Australian Painting, 1788-1990*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Melbourne, Oxford, Auckland, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 333. The first edition of this book appeared in 1962, followed by a second edition in 1971. Bernard Smith asked Terry Smith to write additional chapters to bring the third edition of 1991 up to date.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p. 333.

provincial situation was intrinsically linked to developing metropolises in Australia, of which he wrote, “A metropolis creates a cosmopolitan urban situation by drawing upon many other centres and regions for its own growing population and creates a cultural dynamic from the urban environment so created.”<sup>195</sup>

At the beginning of the 1970s, Smith sensed that the provincial situation in Australia, “though continuing to prevail, was being transformed” precisely by the creation of “nascent metropolitan situations of its own in its main capital cities.”<sup>196</sup> The emergence of new galleries dedicated to showing and fostering modern and contemporary art in Sydney and Melbourne — among them Central Street Gallery, Inhibodress, and Pinacotheca — created a network of artists, dealers, critics, and collectors intensely devoted to the latest developments in art, and these people were in frequent contact with metropolitan centers in Europe and North America via international mail and increasingly affordable airfare. The art produced within this network may have remained indebted to art from elsewhere, but it was better connected with that art than ever before, which presented the possibility that Australian cities could become metropolitan art centers for the first time and Australian art could overcome its provincialism and reciprocate the influence it drew from elsewhere.

Terry Smith, who was a student of Bernard Smith, began to articulate his own ideas about provincialism not long after his teacher. In response to “Notes on the Centre: New York,” an essay celebrating American modernism that the Australian art critic Patrick McCaughey published in the Australian journal *Quadrant* while living and studying in New York on a Harkness Fellowship, Smith wrote “Provincialism in Art,” which appeared in the same journal in

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, p. 334.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 334.

April 1971.<sup>197</sup> Smith identifies in McCaughey's essay "a problem especially pertinent to Australian art at this time, that of the metropolitan/provincial relationship in art," and he makes this the main subject of his essay.<sup>198</sup> He also introduces the idea of an "impossible double bind" facing the provincial artist, who must respond to international art in order to innovate in the tradition of the avant-garde but who is unable to do so because his or her dependence blocks access to the moment of innovation.<sup>199</sup> Smith challenges the "time-lag" issue by observing that provincial artists generally only have access to the mature expression of a style, not the inchoate state from which it emerged, and without access to this prior state, it is impossible for the provincial artist to innovate because the crucial innovation has already taken place by the time the style reaches the provinces. The problem is not how long it takes for American art to reach Australian shores but which American art arrives and why.

Initially, Smith, like his mentor, harbored hopes of an avant-garde emerging in Australia. With Tony McGillick, he curated an exhibition entitled *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?* informed by the term "post-object art," which the critic Donald Brook, another of Smith's teachers in the Department of Fine Art at the University of Sydney, coined to describe the proliferation of new approaches, including performance, installation, Earthworks, and Conceptual art, that were then emerging in the aftermath of modernism in Australia as in the United States and elsewhere.<sup>200</sup> Shown at the Contemporary Art Society in Sydney in 1971, this

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<sup>197</sup> Patrick McCaughey, "Notes on the Centre: New York," *Quadrant* (November 1970): pp. 76-80, and Terry Smith, "Provincialism in Art," *Quadrant* (April 1971): pp. 67-71.

<sup>198</sup> Smith, "Provincialism in Art," p. 67. On these essays, see Heather Barker and Charles Green, "No Place Like Home: Australian Art History and Contemporary Art at the Start of the 1970s," *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (June 2011): pp. 1-17.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>200</sup> For Brook on post-object art, see Donald Brook, "Flight from the Object" (1969) in Bernard Smith, ed., *Concerning Contemporary Art: The Power Lectures 1968-1973* (Sydney: Clarendon

exhibition collected the most recent developments in Australian art, including work sent from New York by Burn and Ramsden. In the exhibition catalogue, Smith noted that the new art had “yet to break down the limitations that have always been present in Australian art,” although he remained optimistic that such a development was imminent:

We still do not have a genuine avant garde art in Australia (only an avant garde relative to previous Australian art). That the new forms of art are not specifically Australian, that they are of a kind that is open, discursive, exploratory, at least establishes two of the many preconditions for a genuine avant garde to emerge in this country.<sup>201</sup>

These ideas and aspirations provide background for Art & Language’s work on provincialism, the first manifestation of which is Burn’s essay “Provincialism,” published in 1973 in the inaugural issue of the short-lived Melbourne-based journal *Art Dialogue* roughly simultaneously with its appearance in the catalogue to the Belgian exhibition *Deurle 11/7/73*.<sup>202</sup> Its primary concern is not distance but context. In particular, Burn, who, as an expatriated Australian, experienced different contexts in depth, living in England from 1964 to 1967 and in New York from 1967 until 1977, is highly critical of the way that artistic exchange between nations imposes

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Press, 1975), pp. 16-34. On Brook and his criticism, see Heather Barker and Charles Green, “Flight from the Object: Donald Brook, Inhibodress and the Emergence of Post-Studio Art in Early 1970s Sydney,” *Melbourne Art Journal* 4 (2009): pp. 1-23.

<sup>201</sup> Terry Smith, “Propositions” in Terry Smith and Tony McGillick, eds. *The Situation New: Object of Post-Object Art?* (Sydney: Contemporary Art Society, 1971), p. 4.

<sup>202</sup> “Provincialism” appears, under a changed title, as Ian Burn, “Art is What We Do, Culture is What We Do to Other Artists” in *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), pp. 131-139.

values developed within one context onto another, and he also introduces the idea that such exchanges are bound up with the social values of the nations involved.<sup>203</sup>

Burn opens the essay with a series of questions that establish national and geographic contexts as the most important to consider in relation to art:

In what ways is a traveling exhibition of contemporary American art useful or destructive? From where does the information come for an Earthwork to make sense in Australia? Can we presuppose that the viewer of a work by Donald Judd in Paris gets the same information as a viewer in New York? Why do European collectors prefer Art & Language texts in English over translated versions? Why is it that the political concerns of many South American artists have the effect of relegating them to minor artist status in New York?<sup>204</sup>

Burn explicitly links these introductory questions to “the present ‘art-world’” and its “hierarchical assumptions” about American art.<sup>205</sup> He also makes clear the ideological implications of provincialism by identifying a correspondence between “the ideology of art” and “a broader United States ideology” according to which “recent art has developed the rules of its

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<sup>203</sup> For Burn’s impressions of the difference between London and Sydney, see Ian Burn, “Situation-Identity” (1967) in Ann Stephen et al, eds., *Modernism and Australia*, pp. 783-789. See also Art & Language, “Making Art from a Different Place” in *Ian Burn: Minimal-Conceptual Work 1965-1970* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1992), pp. 7-17 for Mel Ramsden’s understanding of his Australian collaborator’s cultural difference. Lastly, see Adrian Piper, “Ian Burn’s Conceptualism” (1996) in Michael Corris, ed. *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 342-358, which Piper delivered as the first Ian Burn Memorial Lecture in Melbourne in 1996.

<sup>204</sup> Burn, “Art is What We Do, Culture is What We Do to Other Artists,” p. 131.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

‘game’ to contain a trick ensuring all artists play by the American rules, while only Americans can win — and then not all Americans.”<sup>206</sup>

More generally, Burn proposes, “The meaning or sense of art activities are governed by the contexts they derive from and occur within.”<sup>207</sup> He then puts forward a long list of contextual factors that contribute to how art acquires meaning: “Something may be determined by geographical, or linguistic, or sociological, or political, or economic, or ethical, or anthropological, or experiential, or theoretical grounds.”<sup>208</sup> According to Burn, an adequate description of a context “should be extensive enough to reveal the correspondence of a praxis to its various ideological conditions,” and he contends that this link is produced and sustained through education because those who share a context “have *learned* in similar ways and are therefore capable of communicating with each other.”<sup>209</sup> This understanding of context as a result of learning built upon a diverse array of social factors implies connections between American art to the American ideology behind the Vietnam War: “It can be asserted, for example, that a society which produced and supported the best American art also produced and supported the ideological initiatives for the Vietnam War.”<sup>210</sup> Having put art into relation with other cultural factors, Burn criticizes artists for their “tacit assumption that art is not affected by economics, politics or geography.”<sup>211</sup> He also warns against assuming “that one’s activity is

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

neutral on ideological grounds” and singles out Carl Andre’s often-repeated remark that “Art is what we do. Culture is what is done to us” as characteristic of this misguided belief.<sup>212</sup>

For Burn, the internationalization of art and culture involves the import of standards of judgment from one context to another, where they may be ill fitting. As an example, he cites the case of Hard Edge abstraction in both the United Kingdom and the United States: “To judge that style in England by the values of the American style is to judge the British style as being of a lower value — whereas one should judge it in relation to its own context.”<sup>213</sup> When such misapplications occur, Burn suggests that a hierarchy between contexts is created and the lower contexts are rendered provincial:

There is one main relationship in an hierarchical arrangement: that elicited between higher authority and lower orders. One can gauge from this relationship the effects of subjugation:

- (a) the effect on individuals in the dominant context; and
- (b) the effect on individuals in other contexts (which, for the sake of emphasis, let’s call ‘provincial’).<sup>214</sup>

For Burn, “A provincial context may be internally defining, but what defines the context as ‘provincial’ is significantly externally determined.”<sup>215</sup> He then advances a definition of provincialism: “What provincialism really means is that *significant judgments are being made*

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 133. See Carl Andre, quoted in Barbara Rose and Irving Sandler, “Sensibility of the Sixties” in *Art in America* (January-February 1967), p. 49. The full passage from which Andre’s remark is excerpted is reprinted in Carl Andre, *CUTS: Texts 1959-2004*. James Meyer, ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 30.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

*according to the rules governing behaviour in an ideologically different context.*”<sup>216</sup> Burn also lists two major effects of provincialism: “a cultural impotence for artists of provincial contexts and, intentionally or not, [...] a cultural imperialist policy on the part of those in the dominant context.”<sup>217</sup> Provincialism produces a situation in which “what is good for the dominant American art is good for world art,” and this “guarantees American art a special autonomy and immunity to external criticism and even dialogue, while guaranteeing impotency for other contexts. These,” according to Burn, “are the characteristics of a hierarchical ‘art-world’.”<sup>218</sup>

Implicit in this description are two important ideas: first, neither the dominant nor the provincial context is exclusively responsible for enforcing the hierarchy of dominant and provincial contexts; second, provincialism need not be intended to occur. Given this, Burn’s proposal for contesting the provincial situation is particularly apt. In his words,

What is the missing element? It is some sense of *interplay* between divergent contexts and ideologies, of dialectical opposites to one’s own beliefs and concepts. It is also the strength of the interplay which counts and in turn strengthens and develops divergent contexts. Rejuvenation and the genesis of new ideas depend largely on cultural cross-fertilisations. This does not mean the present kind of ‘exchange’ with foreign artists whose success is already tacitly sanctioned by an American context. It means accepting other contexts for what they are, for what we can learn from ourselves, and not accepting them on the basis of how well they mirror (reinforce) the dominant program.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 136. Emphasis in original.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, p. 138.



For Burn, interplay between contexts would undo hierarchical relations between dominant and provincial contexts and become “the basis of a different self-describing ‘art-world’.”<sup>220</sup>

Burn discussed these and related ideas with Ramsden and Smith, and the results of their conversations appear in the September 1974 issue of *Art-Language*, which is given over entirely to Burn, Ramsden, and Smith’s work under the title *Draft for an Anti-Textbook*. Together, they develop a picture of Art & Language’s activities built on interplay and learning as activities capable of generating the kind of alternative, oppositional art world Burn proposes in “Provincialism,” and two of the thirty-nine sections of *Draft for an Anti-Textbook* are devoted specifically to considering these ideas in relation to the export of American culture to Australia.

The first of the two sections on Australia, entitled “The Unreality of This Culture,” introduces concerns drawn from Marxist philosophy. Art & Language had previously referenced Marxist concepts, especially reification, but their Marxism is amplified in *Draft for an Anti-Textbook*, where it provides analytical tools that enable Art & Language “to go beyond reified objects” and “see art, not just in an object but in the notion of detachment, of detached ‘appreciation’ as a way of life.”<sup>221</sup> The authors conceptualize “detached” American culture as both capitalist and classed, a “bourgeois Culture” that aims “to promote detachment, the unreality of Culture.”<sup>222</sup> This “Official Culture” is exported by “MOMA, Artforum etc.,” who promote it but, Art & Language claim, do not “acknowledge the ideology of what they are

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>221</sup> Burn, et al., “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 1 (September 1974): p. 90.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

doing.”<sup>223</sup> The bureaucratized situation in which this culture thrives is “Kafka-esque” because “there is no one to accept responsibility, no one in control of ‘policy’, no one to ‘blame’.”<sup>224</sup>

For Art & Language, the danger of disseminating Official Culture is not the potential transmission of a specific set of American values as explicit content than the imposition of cultural dependency in the very forms through which any content is transmitted internationally from the United States. This is made possible because such transmissions present art as prepackaged and ready for consumption: “a part of our leisure, part of our ‘time off’.”<sup>225</sup> When one of the discussants — the names of individual speakers are not indicated in Art & Language’s text — poses the question, “What is the result of sending shows to Australia, S-E Asia, Latin America, etc?” the answer proffered is that

It promotes an unreal sense of culture ... that culture is in safe hands, so don’t you worry about it ... and you can vicariously participate in it, by seeing exhibitions, reading about them, and so on. What I am arguing against here is this whole spectator concept of ‘culture’. If a population can tolerate an unreal cultural life, it may tolerate anything.<sup>226</sup>

Enabled by this unreal cultural life, Official Culture “admits only itself as the culture. It’s this which forces me away from ‘constructive’ criticism, my critique is more of a scurrilous nature — more of a ‘deconstructing’ critique.”<sup>227</sup>

To enact this critique, Art & Language explore Official Culture’s societal effects, which are largely implicit and require elucidation. They condemn it for artificially separating itself from

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

society, which, in Australia, is exemplified for they in, “the idea of having a special building for your culture, like the Melbourne ‘Cultural Centre’.”<sup>228</sup> Art & Language call such separation “demeaning” because

the power moguls have their finger on what counts as Culture, and sanction all the new things admitted into that Culture. They allow you to visit this culture at particular times, at a particular place, on weekends, for a small fee. Thus it becomes not something that you as part of society create, but something that you only visit, a spectator culture.<sup>229</sup>

In the end, Art & Language claim, this situation, according to which people are excluded from the production of culture in their roles as spectators, becomes monolithic: “Once you have the bureaucratic machinery set up, it’s going to keep running in essentially the same way.”<sup>230</sup> There is, seemingly, no escape: “Your choices are: play the game and be subsumed, or don’t play the game and be banished, literally out of sight.”<sup>231</sup> Even official support of “an avantgardist ideology,” which would seem to provide a venue for critique, paradoxically cancels out the subversive threat posed by the avant-garde: “the artist producing ‘freely’ and the exploitation of what he or she produces is one and the same process.”<sup>232</sup> The avant-garde comes to reinforce the myth of free creation, thus serving the ideological interests of Official Culture.

Nowhere is this arrangement more clearly embodied for Art & Language than in exhibitions organized by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art in New

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

York.<sup>233</sup> The example on which they fixate in their discussion is *Some Recent American Art*, the eighth International Council exhibition to tour Australia and the first since the influential *Two Decades of American Painting* did so in 1967.<sup>234</sup> *Some Recent American Art* picked up where its predecessor left off, bringing to Australia the proliferation of new styles in American art that followed modernism, Pop, and Minimalism in the second half of the 1960s as well as new mediums such as video. For this sequel exhibition, a number of the exhibiting artists flew to Australia to discuss their work with Australian audiences. Because “‘the locals’ were exposed to a particular artist’s culturing,” Art & Language contend, “nothing of that artist’s enculturation was available. So, in order to respond to that artist’s culturing, for it to be a meaningful encounter, the local is forced into tacit reconstruction of the enculturing ideology.”<sup>235</sup>

The distinction between “culturing” and “enculturation” becomes crucial as Art & Language’s critique of provincialism develops. “Culturing” refers to the effects that art and culture have on their audiences, while “enculturation” is the set of conditions, essentially equivalent to the contextual learning Burn wrote of earlier, within which culture is produced. For Art & Language, the bureaucratized structures of “Official Culture” impose themselves tacitly: “You’re not directly influenced, it sneaks up from behind.”<sup>236</sup> This is so because art that arrives

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<sup>233</sup> On the International Council, see Max Kozloff, “American Painting During the Cold War,” *Artforum* (May 1973): pp. 43-54 and Eva Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum* (June 1974): pp. 39-41.

<sup>234</sup> Jennifer Licht, *Some Recent American Art* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1973). The exhibition traveled to five venues in Australia and New Zealand: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; West Australian Art Gallery, Perth; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; and City of Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland. Joseph Kosuth was among the artists selected by Jennifer Licht, and an excerpt of his “Introductory Note by the American Editor” from *Art-Language* 1, no. 2 (February 1970): pp. 1-4 appears in the catalogue.

<sup>235</sup> Burn, et al., “Draft for an Anti-Textbook,” p. 91.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91.

in Australia from the United States has “culturing” effects on Australians, but the “enculturation” that led American artists to produce such art is not made available; the conditions of production are concealed, and there is none of what Burn earlier called “interplay.”

At a broader societal level, tacit acceptance of American culture that results provides “the ideal conditions for imposing ‘internationalism’,” the risk of which is a mismatch between what Art & Language call “social reality” and “cultural reality.”<sup>237</sup> This detachment of culture from society becomes especially dangerous when social interests are imposed through culture, and, in the case of the Museum of Modern Art, they contend that these interests are equivalent to those of the Rockefeller family, who were prominent trustees of the museum and had extensive ties to the United States government, especially the Central Intelligence Agency. Following from this insight, Art & Language trace parallels between the international interests of the United States government and the shifting international foci of the International Council’s exhibitions: “Latin America in the 1940’s, Europe during the 1950’s, Latin America again then Asia, including Australia, during the 1960’s and 1970’s.”<sup>238</sup> This policy, when combined with the Museum of Modern Art’s tendency to exhibit in the United States international artists “who ‘fit’ best with MOMA’s notion of ‘international art’,” leads to “the uniformity, the one-sidedness, the predictability, and the dullness of art everywhere!”<sup>239</sup>

This situation, however dire, is not entirely hopeless to Art & Language. In the second of the two sections on Australia in *Draft for an Anti-Textbook*, they hypothesize about what an “‘authentic’ culture” as opposed to the Museum of Modern Art’s “‘high’ pain-in-the-arse culture” might be, and propose the need for an “alternate institution” of which, at the time, they

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 96.

can however identify “no model at all.”<sup>240</sup> Unwilling to accept “alternatives like folk-art ... as serious options for us,” Art & Language propose that “something like teaching” might provide a platform for developing an alternative cultural model, and they consider their own group activity, modes of socialization, and collective pedagogy as a possible alternative institution.<sup>241</sup> Obviously, this alternative is not yet as institutionalized like the Museum of Modern Art is. It is, Art & Language claim, more “social ... and there is no clear demarcation when our socializing becomes work.”<sup>242</sup> This indeterminacy, far from being a problem, is quite beneficial for its potential to undermine “the relationships between artist and exhibition and gallery-goer,” which “have been reified and institutionalized along the lines also of teacher/learner ... affirming spectator culture.”<sup>243</sup> Art & Language contrast this to their own work, “whereas in the offshoots of the sociality stuff ... the ‘pandemonium’ and the ‘uproar’, I think we have tried to screw-up that particular relation between people ... at least as it bears on us.”<sup>244</sup> Art & Language’s proposed alternative model effaces the traditional and hierarchical distinction that institutions maintain between teacher and learner in favor of a social situation in which these roles are less defined but learning is still the desired outcome. Such a model encourages more active participation than the enforced passivity of spectator culture. Unlike the bureaucratic facelessness of Official Culture, Art & Language’s proposal is based on more proximal contact between people. Accordingly, “there is no institutional access to A&L, there is only social access, an encounter.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

A transcript of New York conversations similar to those in *Draft for an Anti-Textbook* appears under the title “Brainstorming — New York” in the May 1975 issue of *Art-Language*. (In addition to Burn and Ramsden, Andrew Menard is listed as a contributor to this discussion.) The most significant aspect of this text is its appendix, which is framed as a response to a transatlantic telephone conversation with Harold Hurrell, one of the founders of Art & Language in England. “Hurrell,” Burn and Ramsden report, “asked us on the phone if we would consider the ramifications of ‘Brainstorming 19/9/74’ being read ‘behind the Iron Curtain’ — in Poland.”<sup>246</sup> Hurrell’s mention of Poland is far from arbitrary; in 1975, Art & Language showed work at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw. He apparently intended his remark dismissively to suggest that Art & Language’s concerns in New York were too local to be taken seriously anywhere else, particularly in a place as different from New York as Poland, or at least this is how Burn and Ramsden interpreted him. They respond by imagining Poles reading their text, which gives rise to “a remarkable epistemological problem: how can it be interpreted ‘transituationally’?”<sup>247</sup> Their answer: “There is a heuristic learning situation potentially present in the mapping of the indexicality of the text and the transituational ‘objectivity’ of Polish interpretations.”<sup>248</sup> However, there is also the potential for the process going astray. Speaking of their Art & Language colleagues in England, Burn and Ramsden note, “A lot seems to happen when something crosses the Atlantic, even with people we know. The problem is a lot greater, and perhaps more interesting, with those who are a complete mystery to us.”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Art & Language, “Brainstorming — New York,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 1 (May 1975), p. 36.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, p. 38

In September 1974, Art & Language's New York section had an opportunity to connect with unknown audiences when the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC) in Buenos Aires solicited their participation in an initiative responding to the 1973 military coup in Chile, which replaced Salvador Allende's democratically elected socialist government with a brutal, American-backed military dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet. Invited to submit work to an exhibition called *Homage to Salvador Allende*, Burn and Ramsden produced a poster entitled *To the Commission of Homage to Salvador Allende*. Beneath this title and bordered on left and right by stars reminiscent of the Chilean flag is a lengthy text in the form of a letter to the project organizers that reflects ambivalently on the internationalization of art with specific reference to the CAYC's aspirations. It opens with a hesitant response to the invitation to exhibit:

There are two possible consequences of exposing 'the people of Latin America' to which is called the 'avant-garde art of the big international centers'. The first would be to make it easier for them to criticize the art, to open eyes to its social and ideological problematic. This would be good. The second consequence would be to affirm the already ubiquitous unreality of Official Culture: under the cloak of 'aesthetics' to encourage people to feel 'real' culture is something done elsewhere is alien from what they themselves do. This would be bad.<sup>250</sup>

Burn and Ramsden's concerns about the project stem from a fear that the latter, bad outcome of internationalism is far more likely to result if work is sent from New York to Buenos Aires without substantial reflection on the possible effects it might have at its destination: "The effect of this exhibition, if we read the situation in Latin America correctly [...], will be to enable the corpse of New York dominated Official Culture, the domain of silly adventurism, the gathering

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, p. 38.



place of reactionaries and other peddlars [sic] of aesthetic pretense, to imperialistically dictate ‘culture’ to the people of Latin America — a situation which strikes us as being positively mad.”<sup>251</sup> Their broader assessment of internationalism, of which they believe the CAYC project to be an example, is equally damning:

Internationalism simply means that the moguls of world media power get to say what is international. Under the guise of ‘sharing between people’s [sic] of various cultures’ it is in fact the means whereby a power elite arrogantly assume their own localized values are somehow ‘universal’. Thus internationalism, by condemning ‘local variations’ as provincial and inferior, reinforces its own hegemony and disrupts any possibility of a non-reified culture emerging locally. What better way to promote authority, predictability and dullness! What better way to hide the frailty of subjectivity, to remove the rewards of action, than behind some warped professional idea of ‘culture’.<sup>252</sup>

Their proposal for an alternative to this hegemonic relationship is a reassessment of exhibition practice, but no practical approach is put forward at this stage: “History is, in part, the transformation of social relations into cultural ones. What needs to be done is retrieve social relations from the dominance of reified mystifying cultural ones.”<sup>253</sup> How precisely to do so is unclear, but the problem is, seemingly, shared, and, therefore the basis for further collaborative work: “These are problems faced in any exhibition, though they are increased in ‘international’

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

ones, especially ‘international’ ones in ‘underdeveloped’ countries. They are the problems we are ‘in’ ourselves.<sup>254</sup>

The appendix to “Brainstorming — New York” concludes with a message to Art & Language’s English section about the current working methods in New York:

But do consider all of this in the light of our situation here in the USA. I don’t think any of it (as well as all our other work) has much to do with searching for a transsituational ‘art’ (though it may have, and perhaps ought to have). It’s perhaps only strategic and what’s a strategy if it’s in the wrong place, that is, out of context. All of which means we don’t want this just to appear exotic in Poland, although we might not worry as much if it sounds naive.<sup>255</sup>

As the group in New York moved forward with their work on provincialism, they continued to take local strategic actions in New York, which, as Michael Corris, Preston Heller, and Andrew Menard theorize in an unpublished essay titled “Frontiers in Underdevelopment,” might alleviate provincialism by challenging what they call “New York Ideology,” and the New York’s sections pursuit of local activity led to the foundation of a new Art & Language journal called *The Fox* (see Chapter 4).<sup>256</sup> However, as Art & Language came to understand provincialism as a social system perpetuated in the interactions of local contexts rather than an ideological problem limited to one particular context, whether dominant or dominated, the need for “transsituational” challenges to provincialism became increasingly evident.

A clearer picture about how Art & Language might proceed internationally begins to emerge in Terry Smith’s essay “The Provincialism Problem,” which appeared in *Artforum* in

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>256</sup> Michael Corris Archive, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Box 4, Folder 34, n. p.

September 1974 after discussions about it on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>257</sup> Smith wrote this essay at the invitation of Lawrence Alloway, then an editor at *Artforum*, who asked him to contribute a piece on art in Australia. As requested, “The Provincialism Problem” considers Australian art, but it does so in order to show that provincialism, which Smith defines as “an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values,” is unique neither to Australia nor to art made there but is, rather, a general condition in the art world.<sup>258</sup> Indeed, Smith opens the essay by proposing that provincialism is the common situation for artists everywhere, even in New York, the metropolitan center of the art world:

[Provincialism] is not simply the product of a colonialist history; nor is it merely a function of geographic location. Most New York artists, critics, collectors, dealers, and gallery-goers are provincialist in their work, attitudes, and positions within the system. Members of art worlds outside New York — on every continent, including North America — are likewise provincial, although in different ways. The projection of the New York art world as the metropolitan center for art by every other art world is symptomatic of the provincialism of each of them.<sup>259</sup>

In defining provincialism as “a viewpoint which, while effectively governing majority behavior, is as culturally relative as any other,” Smith opens up the possibility of contesting it at the level

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<sup>257</sup> Terry Smith, “The Provincialism Problem” in *Artforum* 13, no. 1 (September 1974): pp. 54-59. On this essay, see Heather Barker and Charles Green, “The Provincialism Problem: Terry Smith and Center-Periphery Art History,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 3 (December 2010): pp. 1-17.

<sup>258</sup> Smith, “The Provincialism Problem,” p. 54.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 54-55.

of ideology.<sup>260</sup> He acknowledges that “the complex of metropolitan/provincial interrelationships persistently impinge,” and this “has consequences for action throughout the art system” because it establishes “a problematic relevant to all of us.”<sup>261</sup> Smith repeats Art & Language’s earlier concerns about “enculturation” through analogy to the science of genetics by noting, “models and prototypes arrive in the provinces devoid of their genetic contexts,” leading to “a vicious circle of conservatism.”<sup>262</sup> He also repeats earlier ideas about the “provinces” existing within the metropolis:

It is inescapably obvious that most artists the world over live in art communities that are formed by a relentless provincialism. Their worlds are replete with tensions between two antithetical terms: a defiant urge to localism (a claim for the possibility and validity of “making good, original art right here”) and a reluctant recognition that the generative innovations in art ... are determined externally.<sup>263</sup>

This is the heart of provincialism understood as a problem, and Smith calls the alternating pull of the external and the local the “provincialist bind.”<sup>264</sup> Smith puts no faith in “the rise of art centers throughout Europe and in various American cities” during the 1960s as an antidote to provincialism because none makes a forceful enough challenge to New York’s centrality.<sup>265</sup> Instead, “as long as strong metropolitan centers like New York continue to define the state of play, and other centers continue to accept the rules of the game, all the other centers will be

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

provincial, ipso facto.”<sup>266</sup> Indeed, Smith contends, “*As the situation stands, the provincial artist cannot choose not to be provincial.*”<sup>267</sup>

Even relocating to the “strong” metropolitan center does not ease the provincial bind, and Smith notes, “provincialism pervades New York, precisely in that the overwhelming majority of artists here exist in a satellite relationship to a few artists, galleries, critics, collectors, museums, and magazines.”<sup>268</sup> He then asserts that the structure of provincialism is a general condition of cultural dependence not determined by geography but by what he calls “bright stars” in the art world:

There is a structural hierarchy in the operations of the international art world which centers on the bright stars in the constellation, the few artists, galleries, etc. who are “on top” this decade. ... whereas most artists are rule-following, these are both rule-following *and rule-generating* creators. ... Above all, they are in a situation which is culturally privileged for making their moves count.<sup>269</sup>

Smith names several of these stars: Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Allan Kaprow, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Mark di Suvero, Joseph Beuys, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Anthony Caro. Andy Warhol is conspicuously absent, but apart from Pop art, this list encompasses every major movement and style to emerge in New York during the 1960s and early 1970s. Even solving the provincialism problem by “breaking the bind,” as Smith puts it, is not a solution to provincialism itself because “the system is structured so that several artists

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

every few years *have* to break the bind.”<sup>270</sup> Solving the problem perpetuates provincialism. Therefore, Smith suggests, “artists who permit their works to be used in these ways by curators and critics need to reassess just what their ideological commitments amount to.”<sup>271</sup> It matters little where such artists actually live; what counts is that the hierarchical system of the art world presents their work in a way that maintains an ideology of dominance and dependency. Smith’s essay ends with a pointed reminder that “There are no ideologically neutral cultural acts.”<sup>272</sup>

By distinguishing between provincialism itself and the provincialism problem, Smith echoes Linda Nochlin’s critical dissection of the “Woman Problem” in her seminal essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” first published in *ARTnews* in 1971.<sup>273</sup> There, Nochlin proposes that what appears to be a problem is often an illusion, the supposed solution to which serves to reinforce rather than challenge the social interests that the problem ostensibly serves:

Now the “Woman Problem,” like all human problems, so-called (and the very idea of calling anything to do with human beings a “problem” is, of course, a fairly recent one) is not amenable to “solution” at all, since what human problems involve is reinterpretation of the nature of the situation, or a radical alteration of stance or program on the part of the “problems” themselves. ... [Women] must view their situation with that high degree of emotional and intellectual

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p. 59. Emphasis in original.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>273</sup> Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *ARTnews* (January 1971): pp. 22-39, 67-71.

commitment necessary to create a world in which equal achievement will be not only made possible but actively encouraged by social institutions.<sup>274</sup>

In Smith's reply to the Australian critic Elwyn Lynn, whose letter to the editor, written in response to "The Provincialism Problem," appeared in *Artforum* in December 1974, Smith makes an almost identical comment about provincialism's status as a problem, which also echoing Burn's earlier call for a "different sort of self-describing art world":

I tried to underline in my article that we do not have a problem, because that suggests the possibility of a neat solution. Rather, we are all (in no way excluding myself) in a *problematic situation* and, in struggling within it, we try to build not just an alternative, but an oppositional, structure.<sup>275</sup>

Near the end of "The Provincialism Problem," Smith identifies the source of provincialism not in art itself but in the way art is presented to audiences in exhibitions, and this leads him to make a preliminary proposal for treating the provincialism problem through exhibitions that directly address it:

At present, it seems that the most responsible kind of exhibition would be one that took as its aim, not the supposedly "neutral" presentation of a selection of artworks, but the display of the very problematic which its own incursion into a provincial situation raises. This would be difficult, certainly, requiring an unusual

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<sup>274</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (Boulder and Oxford, Westview Press, 1988), p. 151.

<sup>275</sup> Terry Smith, response to Elwyn Lynn's letter to the editor in *Artforum* 13, no. 4 (December 1974): p. 8.

degree of reflexivity and some rethinking of the nature of exhibitions, but it is surely not impossible.<sup>276</sup>

Upon his return to Australia, Smith organized a series of Art & Language exhibitions there and in New Zealand that can be seen as precisely the sort of intervention that he identifies in his essay as most necessary.

Coinciding with Smith's return to Australia in early 1975, three of the major state galleries in Australia invited Art & Language to exhibit: the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, and the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide. Smith seized the opportunity as an occasion to further Art & Language's critique of provincialism by giving it a more practical dimension and greater audience than it had previously enjoyed. In posters announcing the exhibitions, the plans for which Smith developed in correspondence with Burn and Ramsden, who remained in New York but contributed from afar, Art & Language lay out the set of concerns that the exhibitions will address:

The hegemony of Official Culture perpetuates a market-place intelligibility. This is fast becoming a tawdry surrogate for existence.

We have come to realize that we are already shaped by our 'given' roles (the institutionalization of artist, critic, curator, audience) our lives/experience are following as a formality: now the role determines the person, not the other way about: ask not what you can do for Modern Art but what Modern Art can do to you.

This latest form of art-imperialism can only be assailed by first assailing our given producer/consumer 'natures'. Are we in good hands with the Museum

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 59.



of Modern Art and the U.S. Information Service, the professionals the specialists the artocrats/bureaucrats who hand us culture, not something we do but something they do, who ‘creatively’ wrap themselves around the creations of others, not something we do but something they do?<sup>277</sup>

These issues acquired unexpectedly timely relevance in Australia, as the itinerary for Art & Language’s exhibitions inadvertently overlapped times and venues in Sydney and Melbourne with *Modern Masters: From Manet to Matisse*, a blockbuster exhibition of European modernism organized by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, the first since *Some Recent American Art* in 1974. “The coincidence of the Art & Language show and the exhibition ‘Modern Masters: From Manet to Matisse’ at the major State galleries in Australia during May, June and July created a battleground of contrasting conceptions of culture,” Smith wrote shortly after the fact:

The clash has significance both in and beyond New York — where both shows, in different senses, ‘originated.’ Imperialist/colonialist hackles were raised, and there was enacted a drama of censorship rebuffed or ratbaggy curtailed (depending upon your viewpoint).<sup>278</sup>

Indeed, the series got off to a controversial start when the Art Gallery of New South Wales trustees and director Peter Laverty voted to cancel the Sydney exhibition at a meeting on February 28, 1975 following pressure from Liberal Party politician Peter Coleman. Ironically, the year previous, Coleman, who served on the Australian Council for the Arts from 1968-1973,

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<sup>277</sup> Exhibition poster, reprinted in Terry Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975* (Banbury, New York, and Sydney: Art & Language Press, 1976), p. i.

<sup>278</sup> Terry Smith, “Introduction: Fighting Modern Masters” in Terry Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, p. 1. This same text appears in an expanded form as “Review: Fighting Modern Masters,” *The Fox* 2 (1975): pp. 15-21.

published a book entitled *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition: Censorship in Australia*, in which he argued that Australia had overcome its history of censorship.<sup>279</sup> In the June 1975 issue of the journal *Quadrant*, which Coleman edited, Elwyn Lynn, the same critic who objected to Smith's "The Provincialism Problem" with a letter to the editor of *Artforum*, published a lengthy essay about *Modern Masters* that aimed to dismiss Smith's concerns about cultural imperialism as "a gross simplification."<sup>280</sup> The second Art & Language exhibition, scheduled for Melbourne, nearly met with the same fate after *Modern Masters* curator William S. Lieberman, who was in Melbourne at the time, saw the poster Smith created to publicize the Art & Language exhibition there and "promptly threatened to sue the Gallery," citing specifically Smith's mention of the Museum of Modern Art in the poster's text.<sup>281</sup> After an initial cancellation, Gordon Thomson, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, permitted Smith to go forward with the exhibition but only if it was staged "in the Art School in the back of the gallery."<sup>282</sup> Back in New York, Annette Kuhn reported on the controversy for *The Village Voice*. In her "Culture Shock" column, she reports that Art & Language remain "in high spirits. They believe that by attempting to suppress their show the MOMA proved the collective's point."<sup>283</sup>

Smith employed a straightforward format for the exhibitions at the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide, where there was no censorship attempt, presumably because *Modern Masters* did not tour there. Earle Hackett, the Director of

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<sup>279</sup> Peter Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition: Censorship in Australia* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1974).

<sup>280</sup> Elwyn Lynn, "Modern Masters of Modern Politics?" in *Quadrant* (June 1975), excerpted in Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, p. 13.

<sup>281</sup> Smith, "Introduction: Fighting Modern Masters," p. 4.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>283</sup> Annette Kuhn, "Waltz Me Around Again, MOMA," *The Village Voice* (August 18, 1975): p. 42.

the Gallery, even participated in the exhibition. For both exhibitions, Art & Language catalogues, issues of the group's periodicals *Art-Language* and *The Fox*, and other relevant texts, many of which, including typescript drafts of "The Provincialism Problem," were presented in labeled binders, appeared for visitors to peruse on a few tables. The installation recalls Joseph Kosuth's *Information Room (Special Investigation)* of 1970. Posters used in the weeks before the exhibitions as promotion hung on the walls and announced the other component of the exhibition: a series of discussions between Smith, guest speakers, and interested visitors to the gallery that would take, as its points of departure, short messages or "blurts" sent by Burn and Ramsden from New York via a Teletype machine, a form of electronic communication that transmits text over great distance via telephone lines. The poster outlines the format for the discussions:

At regular intervals during the exhibition, Art & Language will send blurts/fragments of discourse from New York to the Gallery. These will be received by Terry Smith who, at the times indicated, will conduct 'dialogues' with invited guests and the gallery public. This means Terry will deal with each blurt praxiologically-concerning himself with the question of embeddedness, the problems of re-embedding, the specific contexts of reference. Look on this exhibition as perhaps a kind of model of what an 'international' exhibition might be like (?). Don't look on it as part of the iniquitous history of 'art-show' morphological 'innovations'. It's separate from the adventurism of current art-

surface-styles as well as from ‘an exchange of information’ in the gee whiz communications theory sense.<sup>284</sup>

Informing this transmission of blurts between New York and Australia was Art & Language’s previous work on language and the difficulties of communication. The hope was to “pick up a lot of (your) socio-cultural ‘noise’, as well as reflect a lot of ours” in order to emphasize that “there isn’t, between you and me, a ‘clear channel’.”<sup>285</sup> Calling attention to linguistic difference makes “ordinarily habitual processes self conscious” and frees up the possibility of investigating the deeper “social, cultural and contextual points of reference” in which “a surface of language... is embedded.”<sup>286</sup> The hoped for result was that “we have some potential for revisability of our languaging/cultural situations...” because the Art & Language exhibitions, in their dialogue format, would open their international discourse to the very people foreclosed from participating by the monologue format of *Modern Masters*.<sup>287</sup>

Smith and Burn made initial plans to publish transcripts of these discussions alongside other material related to the exhibition, including press clippings, interviews, and documents, as an issue of *Art-Language*, but these fell through.<sup>288</sup> Smith produced mockup covers for what would have been the third issue of the third volume of *Art-Language*. Each features the same image: the globe, positioned with New York at the center, causing the rest of the world to appear distorted, with a straight line connecting New York to Australia, which, because of its position in the Southern Hemisphere, is so disfigured as to be barely recognizable. Although this planned issue did not come to pass, the material Smith assembled for it ultimately appeared as a volume

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<sup>284</sup> Terry Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, p. i.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. i.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. i.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. i.

<sup>288</sup> Ian Burn, letter to Terry Smith, dated May 1975, in Terry Smith papers, Sydney.

entitled *Art & Language: Australia 1975* that documents the unique format of Art & Language's exhibitions in Australia, highlighting their inversion of the terms on which international art exhibitions like *Modern Masters* function by reducing the work ostensibly being exhibited to a subsidiary role and opening the kinds of programming that traditionally accompany art exhibitions — lectures, talks, interviews — to audience participation as the very core of the exhibition. The vast majority of this book's pages are given over to transcripts of the discussions, and, unlike a conventional exhibition catalogue, works by Art & Language are not reproduced except in documentary images of the talks, where they can be seen obliquely, resting on tables. Only a brief checklist of the items on display is included.<sup>289</sup> This simple reversal of priority transformed provincialism into one of the subjects of Art & Language's exhibitions rather than one of its products, by foregrounding the production of those who participated in the kind of open discussion about art and culture that is foreclosed by the format of exhibitions like *Modern Masters*.

Art & Language's concerns about cultural imperialism are highlighted on the book's front cover, which features a design by Chips Mackinolty, an artist affiliated with the Earthworks Poster Collective, who worked at the Sydney University Art Workshop, also known as the Tin Sheds, and produced a number of political posters, including many anti-Vietnam War posters, beginning in the early 1970s. Mackinolty's cover for *Art & Language: Australia 1975* appropriates the April 14, 1975 issue of *Time*, which devoted substantial coverage to the Vietnam War under the banner headline "Collapse in Vietnam" above an image from the warzone. At the bottom, coincidentally, is a second headline that reads, "Art: Modern Masters in Australia." A readymade collage, the cover juxtaposes American foreign policy on the military

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<sup>289</sup> See Terry Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, p. 102.

and cultural fronts. Inside the book, several pages preceding the discussion transcripts deepen this connection. The actual masthead page of the April 14 issue of *Time* is reproduced, and it includes, one atop the other, a rather celebratory blurb about *Modern Masters* by the Australian art critic Robert Hughes above a short memo from Ralph P. Davidson, Publisher of *Time*, on the magazine's previous coverage of the Vietnam War.<sup>290</sup> Essays from *Time* and *Quadrant* about *Modern Masters* are reprinted on subsequent pages of the volume and, through collage techniques, are illustrated partially with images of the Vietnam War and related bits of text snipped from *Time* to emphasize similarities between imperialism in its diverse manifestations.

The transcripts themselves occupy the bulk of the book. The first five record conversations in Melbourne between May 28 and June 8, 1975, and the second five document discussions in Adelaide between July 8 and July 12, 1975. In their published form, each transcript is preceded by prompts sent from New York by Burn and Ramsden in the familiar Art & Language format of blurbs (see Chapter 1). In Melbourne, these were transmitted as Telexes sent each day to the exhibition venue using a Teletype machine at the Australian Consulate on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street near Grand Central Station in New York. The Overseas Telecommunications Commission, whose circular OTC logo appears on the wall in some documentary images of the sessions, received the Telexes in Melbourne. Before each session, Smith posted the new Telex on the wall for visitors to examine or copy its contents onto a board, but made clear that these messages were open to contestation: "In a way," he says at the beginning of the first Melbourne discussion, "them sending a message from NY, with the obligation in this set-up that we pay special attention to it, is just as offensive as the Modern Masters package."<sup>291</sup> However, he adds,

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

“in our case the main reason for us getting together now is that we have a chance of, through me, taking the message apart, treating it as problematic.”<sup>292</sup> This Smith posits in contrast to “The structure of the PR surrounding shows like Modern Masters,” to which “you really have no access. ... What we are trying to offer as an alternative to that,” he suggests, “is a kind of dialogue where individuals, each of us, can do our own cultural creating.”<sup>293</sup>

Though edited for clarity, the transcripts are rough. They capture the process of conversation, of working together to build a social space, and given the group’s relative unfamiliarity with one another compared to the tighter cohort of Art & Language in New York, the lack of mutually recognized jargon — what Art & Language call their idiolect — leads to considerable misunderstandings, which give the proceedings a disjointed flow. Early in the first Adelaide session, for instance, Liz Sheridan complains to Smith, “Your jargon is prohibitive — it’s like an Englishman speaking German to a Frenchman.”<sup>294</sup> Smith acknowledges that the language of Art & Language texts is “different because our conversations have a history — we recognize that, for public communicative purposes, it’s got some esoteric edges.”<sup>295</sup> Noel Sheridan, an artist, Director of the Experimental Art Foundation, and the session’s invited guest, suggests, “The opaque, tangled quality of the prose seems a deliberate strategy to communicate with a small group of people, while still leaving open the option for outsiders to be drawn in.”<sup>296</sup> In a later discussion, Sheridan, now sitting in the audience, notes that repeated concern about language is distracting from other, more substantive issues: “Somehow we haven’t touched on the aspects of recent A&L which are interesting: the struggling for ideology, the attacks on

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

cultural institutionalisation which Terry makes, the provincialism problem, the issues about how to go on as artists.”<sup>297</sup>

There were other obstacles to stimulating dialogue. As an unnamed participant in the first Melbourne session points out, “nothing radical can happen here because of the way you’ve structured it with you and your students sitting around the table and the microphones up the front of the room. That’s the same structure as *Modern Masters*.”<sup>298</sup> Smith acknowledges this protestation and discusses the difficulties the group faces: “We spent all last night trying to arrange the chairs so it wouldn’t be hierarchic....the bloody furniture is fascist, it’s school furniture, it’s built on the assumption that people gather in a place to be told what to think.”<sup>299</sup> This, then, is the contradiction driving Art & Language’s exhibitions in Australia: on the one hand, Smith’s position as the sole representative of Art & Language in Australia enables him to mediate between the artists in New York and the audiences in Melbourne and Adelaide; on the other hand, this very same role, in its exclusivity and privilege, threatened to reproduce the very logic of subservience and cultural dependency that Smith hoped to challenge by way of the exhibitions. Accordingly, the challenge facing Smith was twofold: he had to ensure that his role as translator — Smith begins almost every session with a restatement of Burn and Ramsden’s Telexes that he repeatedly calls a “translation” — did not reassert dependence on New York, and, when it inevitably did precisely that, to call attention to the operations of that procedure and reveal the dependency at work.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>300</sup> Smith later published an essay on Art & Language and translation. See Terry Smith, “The Tasks of Translation: Art & Language in Australia & New Zealand 1975-6” in Ian Wedde and Gregory Burke, eds. *Now See Hear! Art, Language and Translation* (Auckland: Victoria



Political differences also caused problems. In Adelaide, the blurts that Smith used came from a working draft of an essay on art and politics by Burn and Ramsden that was broken up into parts, with one part serving as the blurt for each of the five sessions. In it, a character named Comrade Hard-Liner is proposed as a model of an ultra-leftist revolutionary, a kind of straw man against which other political options are weighed. Smith produced a large poster with the heading “COMRADE HARD-LINER” at the top, and he used this as the space for presenting blurts to the gallery visitors. This figure proved useful there, as the audiences and invited guests in Adelaide included members of a far-left group called the Progressive Art Movement that accused Art & Language of failing to serve the people and advocated withdrawal from cultural institutions. At the third session in Adelaide, an unnamed participant states the group’s position: “But the option is clear. You simply don’t work for that art world. Forget it. We should work for the people, in a way they can understand.”<sup>301</sup> Smith deems “the people” too abstract an entity and contends that abandoning the art world neither exempts art from participation in a capitalist system nor counteracts the deleterious effects of the art world on society. The discussion concludes with Smith’s response to artist Julie Ewington’s question about his position and whether it has a program:

what I’m proposing is that we act as terrorists toward our language, i.e. toward all our isms. We should start with the worlds we are in, and reproduce our learning as we go, so that we at least prefigure our ends in our means. We should organize, in order to counteract our histories of soft subjectivism. We should condemn ‘political art’. We forge praxis only in struggling against our rulers, oppressors,

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University Press, 1990), pp. 250-261. See also Burn’s comments on Smith’s article on p. 209 of the same volume.

<sup>301</sup> Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, p. 138.

manipulators — I've been pointing out who they are and how they operate for the past three days. Is that direct enough?<sup>302</sup>

Despite the obstacles impeding Smith's attempts to generate conversation, the discussions do make considerable strides toward addressing what Smith calls "the key problem: how does one engage in art activity, form unspecified, which can be relevant in a way which goes beyond the confines of art history, the elitist artworld which entraps us?"<sup>303</sup> With invited guests including, in addition to those already named, a group of art students from Melbourne universities, philosopher of science Henry Krips, Marxist historian Humphrey McQueen, art critic Patrick McCaughey, and poet Garrie Hutchinson, the group consider a broad range of topics: provincialism, modernism, American foreign policy, the relationship between art and politics, comparisons between art and literature, and the role that institutions play in the reproduction of power. The fifth and final session in Adelaide, for which the art critic and curator Lucy R. Lippard joins Smith as invited guest, returns to many of these issues, and its concentration as summary singles it out among all the discussions for deeper consideration.

Lippard came to Australia to give the Power Lecture in Sydney, and afterwards she traveled through the country lecturing and exploring her interest in women's art there. Not surprisingly, she raises a number of feminist concerns, and relates them to Art & Language, noting that despite the participation of women in the collective and its broader social circle, "A&L has nothing to do with women's problems. It's a dialogue between men. Women are more into other things, that we have to offer — partly because of our conditioning."<sup>304</sup> Despite this reasonable concern about the gender politics of Art & Language, in her analyses of the art world,

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

Lippard has much in common with the group. Of feminism, she says, in words that come very close to those of Art & Language,

Feminism has led me to abandon that idea of endless change in art. Avant-gardism, the notion that everything has to be beyond something else, terms like 'Post-object Art'. Medium and progression are misleading: the emphasis should be on how the work gets across, to what audience; on how far it goes towards subverting the system. We are trapped in a capitalist society. We can go a little way to the left or right, but in either direction you come up against this gigantic wall which you can't pass through if you live in a society which doesn't respect art or artists. The artworld is entirely conservative, and so are artists. This radical wildness and freedom image is nonsense.<sup>305</sup>

Lippard then addresses this picture of the art world to the ambivalences of internationalism, noting that she had previously visited New Zealand to speak in connection with the exhibition *Some Recent American Art*, her visit having been arranged by the Museum of Modern Art. Speaking to the political complexities of that situation, she asserts, "I was well aware I was being used and was able to use them a bit too." Here, Lippard captures the profound uneasiness of operating between a activist desire and the threat that one's own activism can be neutered by an institutional authority that appropriates it to preempt claims that what it is doing might be politically damaging: "But they could say: 'We're so liberal, we can send as our representative someone who has been threatened with arrest in the Museum several times.'" I knew what I was

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

getting into and discussed it in an article in the N.Z. Quarterly.”<sup>306</sup> Lippard also affirms the program Smith outlines for combating provincialism in Australia, and sees its applicability to the United States. Smith’s program includes three points:

The three things I see as crucial for Australian culture.....the gap between high culture and mass culturing — we’ve got to get through that. We’ve got to get through the bluff dichotomy of internationalism/localism. And, thirdly, the issues involved in governmental/state patronage have got to pass ‘The Arts’ and ‘Culture’ as their main references. These are where the issues cluster.<sup>307</sup>

Lippard responds by indicating that these problems are not limited to the Australian situation: “the problems are exactly the same in America.”<sup>308</sup> As for why this is so, she suggests, “The art scenes reproduce each other because they imitate each other as markets. There’s so much that is economically determined.”<sup>309</sup> This conclusion indicates the degree to which Art & Language’s critique of provincialism developed from existing theories that blamed it on geographical distance, through a more encompassing understanding of context to eventually recognize and incorporate that provincialism, as an ideology of cultural dependency, is a universal condition for artists everywhere that serves the economic and military interests of the world’s powerful elites. Moreover, by developing an alternative form of intercultural exchange, Art & Language were taking active strides toward counteracting provincialism in Australia.

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 180. See also Lucy Lippard, “Notes on Seeing Some Recent American Art in New Zealand,” *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly* 59 (1975): pp. 2-3.

<sup>307</sup> Smith, ed. *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

Smith judged the exhibition format a success on terms that are recognizably Art & Language's. In a letter to Burn and Ramsden recapitulating the proceedings in Melbourne, he writes,

it worked far better than I had dreamed — above all, I found myself witnessing the amazing sight of thirty/forty people, who came to each session, very clearly, publicly, evidently learning — making connections they hadn't before, pushing themselves beyond what was previously safe to know, then going further...<sup>310</sup>

Deeming the effort worthwhile, Smith repeated the format when invited to Auckland, New Zealand the following year in what would prove to be his final contribution as a participant in Art & Language. The last page of *Art & Language: Australia 1975* includes a notice that reads,

Also available:

(Provisional) ART & LANGUAGE: AUCKLAND 1976

Transcripts of the discussions held at the Auckland City Art Gallery, August 1976, with related texts and illustrations of the installations 'Media Massacre', 'Medibunk' and 'The Story of Cur, Piggy and the Prefect'.<sup>311</sup>

This volume never came to fruition. It would have documented an Art & Language exhibition and discussion series that conceived executed to examine provincialism outside the bounds of the art world as a general cultural condition that can be analyzed and contested through art. The exhibition also takes up specifically regional themes by taking as its basis Australian media

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<sup>310</sup> Terry Smith, letter to Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, dated June 7, 1975, in Terry Smith papers, Sydney.

<sup>311</sup> Smith, *Art & Language: Australia 1975*, p. 231. The use of the parenthetical "(Provisional)" indicates Smith's adoption of membership provisions proposed by Art & Language in New York during March 1976 (see Chapter 5).

culture and Australian and New Zealand politics. And, as in Australia, it served to introduce Art & Language work to new audiences.

John Maynard, Exhibitions Officer of the Auckland City Art Gallery, first contacted Smith about doing an Art & Language exhibition in the Gallery's Project Programme series while Smith was resident in the United States. Unable to do so at the time, he eventually agreed to the dates August 4-10, 1976 and a format similar to Art & Language's exhibitions in Australia, including a gallery presentation supplemented by public discussions. Initially, two were planned for August 8 and 9, but according to transcripts of the discussions, five occurred, one on August 4, and two each on August 7 and 8. The gallery presentation consisted of two major elements; first, a mixture of Art & Language projects, including the publications and binders displayed in Melbourne and Adelaide, posters for *The Fox* and Art & Language's exhibitions in Australia, a piece by Smith entitled *Project for a "Political Art" Poster* that he presented as a failed work, and a music video entitled *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors* (on this latter work, see Chapter 5); accompanying this selection of Art & Language material was a series of new projects by Smith on Australian media culture.

In 1975, New Zealand elected the socially and economically conservative National Party politician Robert Muldoon as Prime Minister. His election coincided with a shift to the right in Australian politics that occurred after Governor General John Kerr named Malcolm Fraser, head of the Liberal-National Country Party coalition to form a caretaker government and replace Gough Whitlam, Leader of the Labour Party, as Prime Minister. To publicize his exhibition in Auckland, Smith produced and distributed throughout Auckland a poster featuring photographs of Muldoon, Kerr, and Fraser with the words "Piggy," "Cur," and "Prefect" above each of them. In Smith's initial plan, ultimately discarded, it featured these images combined atop the

composite of a pig's head, a dog's head, and police officer's hat in a manner that recalls Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* (1565-1570), which contains a motto warning against repeating the mistakes of the past. In this first, arguably more objectionable form, it received initial approval from the Auckland City Art Gallery Subcommittee after Maynard presented it to them. However, on August 2, shortly before the exhibition was to open, Ernest Smith, Director of the Gallery, informed Maynard and Terry Smith that the poster could not be shown publicly. A meeting was called, and Smith agreed to black out the words atop the photographs on the remaining posters that had not already been posted in the city. On versions displayed in the Gallery, he added, in addition to black bars, a rubber stamp that reads, "THIS POSTER HAS BEEN CENSORED." The controversy surrounding the poster became a minor media event in New Zealand with a short illustrated article appearing on the front cover of the *Auckland Star*.<sup>312</sup>

Despite this act of censorship, the exhibition went ahead as planned, and Smith used the banned words freely inside the gallery. On the gallery walls were three installations comprised primarily of sandwich boards featuring enlarged headlines from Sydney newspapers. The first, entitled *The Story of Cur, Piggy, and the Prefect*, narrates, in the large block letters of sandwich board headlines, the recent shift to the right in Australian and New Zealand politics by revealing how political consciousness was produced and manipulated in and through the media. Second was *Medibunk*, which concerned the proposed general strike that followed Fraser's changes to Medibank, Australia's universal health care program. *Media Massacre*, the third installation, concerns Australian stereotyping of New Zealanders through a collection of sandwich boards

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<sup>312</sup> "Cur, piggy poster censored" in *Auckland Star* (August 5, 1976), p. 1. Smith sent up this cover in a work entitled *Daily Ideology* (1976), commissioned as an Art & Language work but presented as a work by Terry Smith in the 1978 exhibition *The Word in Art* at the National Art Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand. On this work, see Smith, "The Tasks of Translation."

that sensationalize the case of Phillip Western, a New Zealander murderer and prison escapee. According to Smith, he conceived these displays “as a *ta tze pao*, a wall newspaper on the model of the Democracy Wall in China, to which anyone could add their views. Some did.”<sup>313</sup> As installations, they use collage techniques of juxtaposition to expose and compare the ideological commitments of mainstream and underground media. Sometimes, similar sandwich boards are grouped together to show repetition and emphasis; other times, differing perspectives from a tabloid and a radical newspaper are placed side by side to offer differing perspectives on the same event. The language used on these sandwich boards is also subject to critique through its displacement into the gallery space, where condensed headlines, which may make sense within the flow of Sydney street life, become strange and the media’s mystifications of everyday experience come to the fore.

The sandwich boards take over the role that Burn and Ramsden’s blurts played in the Australian exhibitions and served as focal points for discussions that Smith framed “generally under the heading of art and politics.”<sup>314</sup> These began with a decoding of ideological assumptions present in the media, effectively shifting Art & Language’s earlier critique of provincialism in art to wider issues with cultural dependency in general. The five sessions range over a number of topics including the social function of institutions and the role of the artist within them, ownership of the media and the limitations of the media as a form of public discourse, the conditions of cultural production in New Zealand (including comparative discussion of the radically different conditions in China at the time), and more. As in Australia,

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<sup>313</sup> Smith, “The Tasks of Translation,” p. 259.

<sup>314</sup> Typescript entitled “SESSION I – Wednesday 4 August ‘76” in Terry Smith papers, Sydney, p. 1.1. The pagination of the typescript is unorthodox; the first number indicates the session and the second indicates the page of the transcript within that session.



invited guests accompanied Smith, including artists Bruce Barber and Elizabeth Morley; poet and critic Wystan Curnow; journalist Geoff Chapple; representatives of The Progressive Bookshop, a left-wing bookstore in Auckland; and art historians Tony Green, Ian Buchanan, and Mike Dunn; and the audience is vocal as well.

Smith's shift in emphasis from the rather exclusive domain of art to the more pervasive space of media culture entails a final shift in Art & Language's approach to the international cultural exchange. Art and the art institution now figure as sites for combating cultural dependency, though their capacity to reproduce it is not forgotten. In coming to the defense of institutions, Smith notes both that he is willing to exhibit anywhere "because I believe in public cultural institutions as I believe in organized society" and that that he works within an institution, a university, as a teacher of art history, having taken up a position at the University of Sydney.<sup>315</sup> He adds, however, that, despite the institutional capacity for reproducing power, its appropriation of opposition can never be total, and thus the correct position to take up is an oppositional stance within institutions:

It is possible for people to work oppositionally within universities and oppositionally within galleries because they want to construct them differently, because they believe they are right and they've got arguments for it and got experience to show it [...] I mean precisely that the activity of creativity, of generating imagery[,] of setting up contrasts, of making intuitive leaps and grasps, producing symbols, that whole human process can't be annexed — not all of it, but most of it can and most of it has been. What's left are people who, because of

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 1.4.

contradictions in the bourgeois takeover, are produced as opponents, and in that opposition is where the hope for the future lies.<sup>316</sup>

As Smith prefigured in “The Provincialism Problem,” there is no solution to the provincialism problem, but in turning to a contestation of the relations of production and the ideology of domination and submission that sustains it in art and in culture, Art & Language’s predilection for dialogue locates not a solution to provincialism but its dissolution. The provincial artist need cannot escape his or her provincialism, but he or she can attack the structures that produce and reproduce it.

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, p. 1.4.

#### 4.0 FOXES AND HEDGEHOGS

In 1974, Joseph Kosuth assembled a number of participants in Art & Language to conceive and launch a new publication called *The Fox*, which was to be edited in New York as an alternative and sometimes antagonist to Art & Language's established journal, *Art-Language*, which had been edited in England since 1969. Art & Language Foundation, Inc. was incorporated in New York to attract grants for *The Fox* and other projects related to the general theme of art education, and both the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council of the Arts provided support. During a series of meetings late that year at The Local, a basement bar in Greenwich Village owned by Mickey Ruskin, who also owned the famous artists' bar Max's Kansas City, the newly established editorial board formulated the journal's direction. According to a call for contributions to the first issue, Art & Language envisioned "a periodical devoted to theoretical and critical concerns in any of the possible contexts of art-related practice (praxis)."<sup>317</sup> While the launch of this new and independent initiative marks a fresh start for the New York section of Art & Language and asserts a newfound independence from their English counterparts, it also remains continuous with earlier projects. Like previous work, *The Fox* is as a forum for conversation about how best to organize a community relative the present state of the art world. As before, those participating disagree and encourage disagreement; the introductory

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<sup>317</sup> Quoted in Alexander Alberro, "One Year Under the Mast: Alexander Alberro on *The Fox*," *Artforum* (Summer 2003): p. 163.

note published at the front of the first issue calls for the creation of “some kind of community practice” and welcomes responses “pro and con” as contributions to that initiative.

Welcoming plurality and even contradiction was entirely appropriate given the particular fox after which *The Fox* took its name. A fragment attributed to the ancient Greek poet Archilochus compares foxes to hedgehogs: “πόλλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχῖνος ἐν μέγα.” Douglas E. Gerber translates this as “The fox knows many tricks, the hedgehog one, but it’s a big one.”<sup>318</sup> Isaiah Berlin references this fragment of Archilochus in his 1951 essay “Lev Tolstoy’s Historical Scepticism,” which he later revised and expanded to become the book *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History*, which is where Art & Language encountered it:

For there exists a great chasm between those, on the one side, who relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel — a single, universal, organizing principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance — and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some *de facto* way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related by no moral or aesthetic principle; these last lead lives, perform acts, and entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal, their thought is scattered or diffused, moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects

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<sup>318</sup> Douglas E. Gerber, ed. *Greek Iambic Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 216-217. Gerber’s translation does not contain a judgment as to whether the fox or the hedgehog has the right approach. M. L. West, however, does. He translates the fragment: “The fox knows lots of tricks, / the hedgehog only one — but it’s a winner.” See M. L. West, ed. *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5.

for what they are in themselves, without, consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them into, or exclude them from, any one unchanging, all-embracing, sometimes self-contradictory and incomplete, at times fanatical, unitary inner vision. The first kind of intellectual and artistic personality belongs to the hedgehogs, the second to the foxes....<sup>319</sup>

By naming their new journal after Archilochus' fox, as glossed by Berlin, the editors consciously positioned it within both Art & Language as a whole and the art world in New York where it circulated most and found its largest audience. In New York, Art & Language welcomed participation from an increasingly number of people, and they were as likely to disagree with one another as to seek consensus, while the growth of Art & Language in England slowed. The group there eventually began to shrink, and its work increasingly became identifiable with that of Michael Baldwin, one of Art & Language's founders. Between the pages of *Art-Language* and *The Fox*, to which participants in both sections of Art & Language continued to contribute, a debate about the future of the collective plays itself out, with lines drawn and redrawn as the consensus attitude in England conflicts with the pandemonium in New York.

At the same time, the fox's wiliness appealed to Art & Language's desire to avoid what they saw as their art world peers' single-minded embrace of the commodity form in conformity with the logic of the art market. Against this, *The Fox* was polemical even in its appearance, which eschewed the glossy pages and full bleed color images characteristic of most art

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<sup>319</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), pp. 1-2. For the original essay, see Isaiah Berlin, "Lev Tolstoy's Historical Scepticism," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 2 (1951): pp. 17-54, which is reprinted as "The Hedgehog and the Fox" in Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Penguin, 2008), pp. 22-81.

magazines for inexpensive newsprint with cardboard covers and entirely black and white contents. Only the covers of each issue were printed in color, and then only a single color: green for the first issue, red for the second, and blue for the third. The use of Copperplate Gothic on the cover and for titles is the journal's only other concession to decorativeness. The few images that appear are reproduced in high contrast and poor quality. The emphasis is squarely on text, most of which is polemical, and, on account of its hostile tone, *The Fox* was not well received by its initial readers. Mona da Vinci provided a clearly pseudonymous and particularly harsh review of the second issue for the *Soho Weekly News*. She (he?) accuses *The Fox* of

mobilizing offensive attacks against art, art history, *Artforum*, artists, art education, formalist and phenomenologist criticism, the phenomenon of Don Judd, art politics, art museums, public art, in fact, anything that relates to our American 'capitalist ethos,' which is everything, including *The Fox* itself.<sup>320</sup>

The editors of *The Fox* would have taken less issue with da Vinci's characterization than with her claims that Art & Language were "'failed' conceptual artists" and "a secondary community of beaten survivors."<sup>321</sup> Kosuth, in fact, declared that it was precisely the status and future of conceptual art that was at stake in *The Fox*: "Us old warlords of conceptual art have gotten together," he told Annette Kuhn of the *Village Voice*, to enact "the formalization of the schism between theoretical conceptualists and the stylists."<sup>322</sup> Though the intentionally contentious journal garnered mostly negative reviews, it was not without an impact on younger artists. Jenny Holzer recalls, "when I first came across *The Fox* I thought it was great. It

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<sup>320</sup> Mona da Vinci, "The Fox and Other Fairy Tales," *Soho Weekly News* (December 25, 1975): p. 17.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>322</sup> Joseph Kosuth, quoted in Annette Kuhn, "Culture Shock," *The Village Voice* (April 14, 1975): p. 100.

introduced me to politics in art.”<sup>323</sup> Despite its influence, *The Fox*’s allegiance to the crafty fox of Archilochus’ fragment would be its undoing, as the unified forces of these two hedgehogs would, as they do in Archilochus, prove overwhelming for Art & Language’s section in New York.

The foxes listed on the editorial board for the first issue are Sarah Charlesworth, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, Kosuth, Andrew Menard, and Mel Ramsden. Of these names, only Charlesworth’s is new to Art & Language. An aspiring photographer, she became involved with both the collective and *The Fox* via her relationship with Kosuth; her participation would prove brief, contentious, and important for setting the direction that both the magazine and the collective would subsequently take. Conspicuously absent from the editorial board is Ian Burn, who nevertheless appears on the masthead of the first issue as reviews editor. The third issue, published in 1976, would be the last. Over the course of its short life, the editors, who were also major contributors, published a considerable amount of writing, mostly about the relationship between art and politics, though *The Fox* was not in any conventional sense a political journal. Rather, it responded to the politicization of the art world during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the formation of groups such as the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC), which sought to improve working conditions for artists and for whom Kosuth once created fake visitor’s passes to the Museum of Modern Art as part of a protest movement to gain free admission to the museum for artists.<sup>324</sup> Several of the most insightful articles in *The Fox* are less attempts to politicize art or

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<sup>323</sup> Jenny Holzer, quoted in Michael Auping, *Jenny Holzer* (New York: Universe, 1992), p. 74.

<sup>324</sup> On this turn, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Art and Radical Politics in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: The University of California Press, 2009). Also relevant is Julie Ault, ed. *Alternative Art New York: 1965-1985* (Minneapolis, London, and New York: University of Minnesota Press and The Drawing Center, 2002). On the AWC, see Lucy

artists than critiques exposing ways that politicization can and quite often does reproduce the same logics of exclusion and oppression that it supposedly unmasks. Neither anti-political nor apolitical, *The Fox* is rather a cautious journal that sought to elucidate what political or politicized art is and what else might be.

This examination of politics extended well beyond New York, and *The Fox* received significant contributions from many of the places where Art & Language had forged or was forging working relationships. Their Yugoslavian collaborators Zoran Popović and Jasna Tijardović discuss the situation facing artists in Belgrade in its pages (see Chapter 5), and Terry Smith reports there about his ongoing Art & Language work in Australia (see Chapter 3). Perhaps most significantly for the future of Art & Language as a transnational association, *The Fox* includes segments of a protracted debate over political concerns that strained relations between New York and England and precipitated a series of meetings in New York during late February and early March 1976 at which criteria for membership in Art & Language were, for the first time, established.

However, the content of *The Fox* was not limited to the relationship between art and politics. The fox-like tendencies of the journal's editorial board and its contributors ensured that a wider range of subjects were considered: in addition to reflections on that major theme by nearly all involved but especially Corris, Menard, and Heller, Burn and Adrian Piper discuss the pricing of artworks, Dave Rushton and Paul Wood reflect on art education, Kosuth considers and reconsiders the legacy of conceptual art, Terry Atkinson theorizes on language use, Smith reflects on the practice of art history, and so on. Reviews of recent publications and exhibitions

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Lippard, "The Art Workers' Coalition" (1970) in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Idea Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1973), pp. 102-115.



by T. J. Clark, Linda Nochlin, John Berger, Hans Haacke, and Ian Wilson situate *The Fox* within a milieu of Marxist art theory and the legacies of conceptual art. Letters to the editor poured in from throughout North America and Europe, revealing wide readership. Kuhn, in her brief blurb on *The Fox* for the *Village Voice*, notes that the first issue was slated to appear April 15, 1975 in an edition of 4000 copies at a cost of \$2 (Charles Harrison lists the print run of the first issue at 3,000, and that of the second and third issues at 5,000 each), the size of the run and the relatively low cost indicating the editors' desire for wide distribution, which was handled by Jaap Reitman, a New York bookseller, whose shop in SoHo was a gathering place for artists. Reitman made *The Fox* available through middlemen in the United States, Canada, Italy, France, Germany, and England.<sup>325</sup>

To announce the impending arrival of *The Fox*'s debut issue, Art & Language distributed a poster throughout downtown New York. In the name of "a revaluation of art-practice," the poster suggests that *The Fox* will consider "the chances for learning and cultural responsibilities of art in the post-modernist period" through investigations of art, politics, power, bureaucratization, consumerism, economics, art education, art history, language, and so on, concluding with a call to "search for alternatives." Reference to a "post-modernist period" indicates continuity with earlier work by Art & Language's New York section, in which modernism had been a topic of much lambasting, and a new confidence that an as yet undefined successor to modernism had emerged and might function as a site of contestation and struggle in which Art & Language could stake a claim for "learning and cultural responsibilities for art."

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<sup>325</sup> Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 122.

When the first issue of *The Fox* appeared in April 1975, Charlesworth's article "A Declaration of Dependence" provided an initial salvo that introduces many of the themes to which other contributors to the journal return in their own pieces. The title calls attention to the fact that artists remain fundamentally dependent on the art world that surrounds them, and the essay reasserts many ideas about art and art world familiar from Art & Language's earlier work, though the increasing prominence of Marxist terminology, nascent in earlier work, provides new analytical tools for addressing these old problems. Charlesworth puts forward a base-superstructure model of the relationship between society and ideology, though not an altogether deterministic one. She differentiates between "political and economic order" and "ideological and intellectual traditions," and she further proposes, "the ideological structure of society integrates and legitimizes the institutional order by explaining and legitimizing its objectivated meanings."<sup>326</sup> For art to transform society, Charlesworth maintains that not only ideology — art and culture — but this institutional order must be taken into consideration:

[... T]he structural system of the art-world, which provides a context for the social signification of art, is itself contextually situated in a social system, the structure of which it in turn reflects. At this point, attempts to question or transform the nature of art beyond formalistic considerations must inevitably begin to involve consideration not only of the presuppositions inherent in the internal structure of art models, but also critical awareness of the social system which preconditions and drastically confines the possibility of transformation.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Sarah Charlesworth, "A Declaration of Dependence," *The Fox* 1 (1975): p. 1.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

As before with Art & Language, “the bureaucratic structure of the New York art world” is held up for criticism as are “socially convenient (marketable) formal models of art (i.e. painting and sculpture)” supported by “more abstract socially convenient (non-controversial) theoretical models (formalism, art for art’s sake).”<sup>328</sup> Added to this is the persistence of “the individual artist” who produces work of “quality.”<sup>329</sup>

If these criticism seem similar to those voiced in earlier work by Art & Language, Charlesworth’s next move shows that reiterating them remains an important component of any transformative struggle, artistic or social. She contends that the conditions of production that support this kind of art and art criticism are not so easily contested: “they are *implicit and internalized* to such a degree that they inform *every aspect of our self and social consciousness* upon which all praxis is founded.”<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, “The artist may then be unwittingly supportive of ideals or conditions in relation to which he sees himself as neutral or even opposed.”<sup>331</sup> But, even if they are trapped in this situation, artists are not incapable of critical thinking about the social effects of the choices they make, and transformation is not impossible. Individuals can “begin to accept a responsibility for the social implications of their actions.”<sup>332</sup> From this “a collective spirit or consciousness conducive to social change can occur,” and she points to “my involvement with The Fox” as one instance of this.<sup>333</sup> But, for Charlesworth, there is a fundamental tension in the relationship between individual choice and social responsibility, and this goes some way toward accounting for the reproduction of existing models of production:

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

For each of us there is a certain element of contradiction involved in the majority of personal and professional choices that we make, a certain tension between self survival/self interest and social interest/species survival. [...] None of us, neither artist, critic, dealer, curator, nor “patron of the arts,” can be said to be free of conflict of interest when it comes to the making of the cultural phenomena “art.”<sup>334</sup>

This conflict between individual and society is, Charlesworth argues, foundational for the old order of modern art. She conceives of its history as “a veritable march of progress in the name of freedom, of individuality, of *art*.”<sup>335</sup> This she judges “the *failure* of that art — and the logic it embodies — to adequately comprehend and respond to the exigencies of a very real social and ideological predicament [...]”<sup>336</sup> Progress leads art to an art-for-art’s-sake stance, which Charlesworth rejects. She tracks its history back through Ad Reinhardt’s formula of “art-as-art” and Théophile Gautier’s 1834 preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* to Kant’s “idealistic conception of disinterested and pure beauty,” which she finds incompatible with “an age when the creation of beauty and aesthetic enjoyment are no longer the self-proclaimed ends of art.”<sup>337</sup> Such art finds its limit in the autonomous art object, against which Charlesworth cites the art

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, p. 4. For Reinhardt, see Ad Reinhardt, *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*. Barbara Rose, ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991). For Gautier, see Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Helen Constantine, trans. (New York: Penguin, 2006). For Kant, see, of course, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. Rainer S. Pluhar, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

historian Arnold Hauser's comment to the effect that "The greatest works of art forego the deceptive illusion of a self-contained aesthetic world and point beyond themselves."<sup>338</sup>

Charlesworth then poses that conceptual art offers some release from the art-for-art's-sake attitudes of modernism, though in a limited way. While she notes that "So-called conceptual art represents, among other things, an attempt to redefine art value or significance in terms of its ideational rather than physical ('experiential') attributes," she also concedes that "it *functions in society* in a manner not unlike previously more morphologically oriented work."<sup>339</sup> In the end, "art as idea as art product, alas, moves in the world of commodity-products and hardly the realm of 'idea.'"<sup>340</sup> However, in this failure, there is cause for hope: "We can *learn* as much, in a sense, through the 'failure' of concept art as we do through its partial success."<sup>341</sup> Regardless, Charlesworth offers, "we exist as its inevitable heirs."<sup>342</sup>

After describing where art and the art world stand, Charlesworth offers a potential direction forward:

What is called for is [...] the gradual creation of a community, a discourse, an art, which is not so much the reflection of our competitive and antagonistic pursuits as it is a common vehicle through which we might continually examine not only our own values and assumptions, but those of the culture of and to which we ideally speak.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Arnold Hauser, quoted in Charlesworth, "A Declaration of Dependence," p. 4.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

Charlesworth's prescription is phrased like a plea for an entirely new practice, a revolution in cultural action, but it is essentially a description of Art & Language's ongoing activity, in which "community," "discourse," and "art" are coterminous and provide those who participate in shaping this mixture with opportunities to reflect on self and world with an eye to changing them.

How this "gradual creation" should and would "continually examine" itself and its context is contested from the outset, and many of the contributions to the first issue of *The Fox* present different ideas about how Art & Language should proceed as a group. These are the same kinds of debates that motivated earlier Art & Language work such as the annotations of 1973, but now undertaken on a public platform before an audience well beyond the immediate participants. The disclosure of Art & Language's internal tensions and problems in *The Fox* is at once the public airing of as private grievances and, given Art & Language's communal aim as set out by Charlesworth in "A Declaration of Dependence," an attempt to openly and honestly envision and practice the kind of social, intellectual, and cultural organization that its makers desire. In other words, the private problems facing Art & Language are either symptoms of society at large or lessons for that society to heed, and are thus potentially of public significance. As might be expected, a variety of perspectives emerge.

In the first issue of *The Fox*, Kosuth, who studied anthropology at The New School during the early 1970s with the politically and philosophically inclined anthropologists Bob Scholte and Stanley Diamond, envisions the artist as "a model of the anthropologist *engaged*."<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "The Artist as Anthropologist," *The Fox* 1 (1975): p. 24, reprinted in Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. Gabriele Guercio, ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 117, from which all further citations are taken. All emphases are in the original.

Kosuth accounts for art as a form of theory with practical consequences: “In the sense that it is a theory, it is an overview; yet because it is not a detached overview but rather a socially mediating activity, it is engaged, and it is praxis.”<sup>345</sup> Unlike anthropology, which, as an academic pursuit, is “*dis-engaged*,” art “is manifested in praxis; it ‘depicts’ *while* it alters society.”<sup>346</sup> In contrast to scientific anthropologists, who are “not part of the community” they study and thus remain “outside of the culture,” the artist as anthropologist endeavors “to obtain fluency in his *own* culture.”<sup>347</sup> This is “a dialectical process which, simply put, consists of attempting to affect the culture while he is simultaneously learning from (and seeking the acceptance of) that same culture which is affecting him.”<sup>348</sup>

Corris takes a different tack and looks to revising the figure of “the critic-historian” as a model for the artist to follow in his article “Historical Discourse.”<sup>349</sup> He rejects “the role of mediator between the ‘uninformed’ public and the work of the artist” because of its complicity with a public sphere corrupted by “the economic-ideological resources of monopolistic capitalism” as well as what he takes to be fundamental methodological errors stemming from the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation represented by Wilhelm Dilthey, which Corris argues overlooks “the ‘theory-ladenness’ of observation” and carries over into current art criticism and art history.<sup>350</sup> Corris rejects this traditional understanding of critical and historical functions, and he urges artists to both “*forget* Art History” and to resist its “rationalization/objectification” of

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, p. 119, p. 117.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, pp. 119-120.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>349</sup> Michael Corris, “Historical Discourse,” *The Fox* 1 (1975): p. 84.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, pp. 84-85. On Art & Language and the theory-ladenness of observation, see Chapter 1.

historical process.<sup>351</sup> Despite admitting that his own attempts to produce an alternative art history of collaborative practice have arrived at mixed results, and that his alternative history does not necessarily enable present practice, he concludes by calling for “Historical discourse *transformed*” through work, such as Art & Language’s, that does not configure itself as a calculated response to a sequence of historical precedents, thus remaining trapped within the overarching logic of that series, but instead investigates and, where appropriate, endeavors to change, presently obtaining historical “conditions of the production of cultural objects.”<sup>352</sup>

Though the bases for Kosuth’s and Corris’ respective approaches differ, they strive toward the same goal: illumination of the situation facing artists via a detour through activities outside of, though not unrelated to, art, with an eye to the transformation of that situation in which artists work. The methods they describe and demonstrate yield a shared picture of a bureaucratically organized art world beholden to market interests that artists can resist by organizing alternative forms of community or alternative approaches to social action. Neither is particularly clear about how such resistance is actually to occur. Ramsden, in his essay “On Practice,” also published in the first issue of *The Fox*, questions whether the radical ambitions of practices such as those Kosuth and Corris describe are capable of changing the art world in which Charlesworth claims they are working or realizing the kind of community she and they desire, and he reaches skeptical conclusions about the potential for the radical transformation of either art or society.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid, p. 92. Emphasis in original.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, p. 94. Emphasis in original.

<sup>353</sup> Mel Ramsden, “On Practice,” *The Fox* 1 (1975): pp. 66-85. All citations are to the reprinting of this text in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), pp. 170-199. All emphases are in the original.



Paralleling Charlesworth's remarks about internalization, Ramsden asserts that the kinds of problems Kosuth and Corris diagnose may be so engrained that even oppositional practice actually works to reinforce them, and that this accounts for the difficulties envisioning alternative social arrangements. "I know, for example," Ramsden writes,

that rabid ambition and careerism — almost the New York art world's *raison d'être* — are present in myself, even though I'm perfectly aware of their presence. This would lead me to believe, assuming there are others like me, and I know there are, that the market isn't just contingently there, that we don't just create freely and only afterwards get bulldozed by the market. That we now practice with the market in mind (and I'm not loftily excepting my own writing here).<sup>354</sup>

Ramsden indicates clearly that he does not think "that New York artists want to be Imperialist puppets," however he suggests that "even those who profess unique political awareness — having no doubt been 'radicalized' at one point or another of their lives — just don't make the connections they ought to between their work and (e.g.) the spread of a marketing expedient like 'international art.'"<sup>355</sup> Ramsden is particularly skeptical of those who "dwell perennially on an institutional critique without addressing specific problems within the institutions" for they may not only affirm the very things they seek to criticize but also "may even act as a barrier to eventually setting up a community practice (language ... sociality ...) which does not just embody a commodity mode of existence."<sup>356</sup> Ramsden is specifically critical of the AWC, though his remarks about them extend to political art generally:

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid, pp. 171-172.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, pp. 172-173.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

I remember finally coming to the conclusion that the impotence of the AWC lay in this refusal to deal with “work” — what we each *do*; that is, *practice*. It appeared sure that part-time *politicking* wasn’t enough, that we now must have a revision of the commodity status of the work itself.<sup>357</sup>

To “facilitate some hope of ‘authenticity,’” Ramsden, like his colleagues, proposes the creation of “a tradition (community) which does not embody a commodity mode of existence,” but he is not particularly optimistic about the possibility of actually creating one.<sup>358</sup> He suggests that “such an ‘oppositional alternative’ (or numerous such alternatives)” may be impossible, but “if it is possible, can only arise within communities whose *sociality* (language ... grammar ...) is its own.”<sup>359</sup> He proposes neither anthropology nor history but teaching and learning as the practices capable of commandeering sociality and generating community: “Commitment to teach and learn is a commitment first to dialogue, to commonality, not point of view or authority. Teaching is constituted through a particular person’s praxis. This is what we’re after.”<sup>360</sup> Even teaching and learning have long been central to Art & Language’s activity, the final twist of Ramsden’s phrasing acknowledges that their present work is at best only transitional and yet to achieve its aims. He describes *Art-Language* and *The Fox* as “at least mouthpieces of a community,” but this is, according to him, insufficient to exempt them from the possibility of also being “functionaries of a market.”<sup>361</sup>

Faced with “an automatic system” in New York that is set up “to further augment the gray-official alienation of culture,” any attempt to foster community activity is imperiled because

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid, p. 196.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, p. 190.

the system itself does not permit genuine cultural exchange.<sup>362</sup> “A ‘search’ ‘outside’ the art bureaucracy” for “making our work ‘public’” is also problematic, and Ramsden rejects the search for larger audiences as “the rating worries of TV executives.”<sup>363</sup> He further suggests that “this concept of mass audience” is inappropriate for the kind of sociality he envisions, as it is “more a question of a manic rational power construct than a question of mutual exchange or encounter.”<sup>364</sup> Ramsden is also skeptical of working outside New York in “the international *Kunstwelt* carousel.”<sup>365</sup> He rejects international exchanges such as “Seth Siegelaub’s so-called ‘network of booksellers and mailing lists’” as the embodiment of “a nasty guiding art-imperialistic concept of spreading ‘information’ globally as if it existed impersonally somehow, independent of anybody in particular having practical needs (frailty).”<sup>366</sup> Ramsden has additional, economic concerns about working internationally:

The reason art can be “international” (a rubric which, as Ian Burn points out, is correctly a market not a cultural term [...]) is not the result of any daft McLunacy like the growth of a “global village” but because of a global acquisition system, always needing to expand, automatically operating apart from, and systematically bulldozing, any local practice.<sup>367</sup>

Only a community that meets to dialogue and learn is capable of producing and sustaining the social change that Ramsden desires, and the prospects for this surviving and thriving are, he implies, dim at best.

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid, p. 189.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, p. 189.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid, p. 189-190.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid, p. 189.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid, p. 190.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

Art & Language's English section shared Ramsden's dour assessment New York, including the participants in Art & Language working there. Michael Baldwin and Philip Pilkington's "For Thomas Hobbes," their contribution to the first issue of *The Fox*, begins:

The editors wanted something written about New York. What a bizarre idea.

One prevailing emotion (is that what it is?) is our snobbery in relation to the community allegedly under scrutiny. 'Why are so many of them so thick?' is perhaps not the sort of question we should be asking.

Another question: 'Why are there so few 'real' conflicts?' There seems to be support for Parsonian Open-Society-recommendations in the critical to-ing and fro-ing of New York's art community.<sup>368</sup>

The assessment of *The Fox* itself was equally dour in England. Writing in *Art-Language* in May 1975, Art & Language — the specific authors and contributors are indicated as Charles and Sandra Harrison, Philip Pilkington, Dave Rushton, Paul Wood, and, foreshadowing realignments to come, Ramsden himself — dismissed *The Fox* as "Utopian Prayers and Infantile Marxism."<sup>369</sup> In a short polemic, they attack it for lacking "any recognition of an historical materialist conflict within ideology," without which "it would be difficult to suggest a de facto dysfunction-condition wherein 'learning' may take place."<sup>370</sup> These harsh words call into question the validity of Art & Language's work in New York, and they drove a wedge between the two sections. Whatever congeniality remained between the two sections quickly evaporated, and an openly hostile tone develops between the two main sections of Art & Language.

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<sup>368</sup> Michael Baldwin and Philip Pilkington, "For Thomas Hobbes," *The Fox* 1 (1975): p. 8.

<sup>369</sup> Art & Language, "Utopian Prayers and Infantile Marxism," *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): pp. 89-92.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

Nowhere is this conflict more clearly presented than in a clash between Baldwin and Burn that comes to a head in the May 1975 issue of *Art-Language*. A note at the back of the issue advises readers about “something like incompatibility between the various pieces of writing in this collection.”<sup>371</sup> Specifically,

Objections were raised to an article which Ian Burn published in ‘Artforum’, and he was sent a somewhat carefully composed document (published here). His response to this, also published here, appears to compound the original errors. We can only assume either that Ian Burn did not read what he was sent, or that he read but felt that he was in a position to ignore it (which he was not).<sup>372</sup>

A footnote to this passage adds insult to injury: “For example, as Dennis Wright said of a ‘political artist’ in Belfast: ‘The silly fucker, hasn’t it occurred to him that one side might be right?’”<sup>373</sup>

The article in question is Burn’s essay “The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation,” which appeared in *Artforum* in April 1975.<sup>374</sup> The sections into which the text is divided are given headers that, when put together, pose a question: “WHILE WE’VE BEEN ADMIRING OUR NAVELS/WE HAVE BEEN CAPITALIZED AND MARKETING/BUT THROUGH REALIZING OUR SOCIALIZATION/MIGHT WE BE ABLE TO TRANSFORM OUR REALITY?” Contending that, under obtaining conditions, “works of art *start off* as

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<sup>371</sup> Art & Language, “A Note on Pseudo-Debate,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): p. 95.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid, p. 95

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>374</sup> Ian Burn, “The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation,” *Artforum* 13, no. 8 (April 1975): pp. 34-37. All citations are to the reprinting of this text in Ian Burn, *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), pp. 152-166. This text is also reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 320-333.

commodities,” Burn advocates in favor of “scrutinizing certain historically unique aspects of our market relations.”<sup>375</sup> He also proposes, “the work of (fine) art has become the ideal exchange commodity in our society” because it finds its value almost “strictly in an exchange market (not involving production)” and is thus subject to impersonal market manipulations.<sup>376</sup> As a result of this, the artist is “‘created’ by the market as merely part of a labour force” as a “politically conservative” figure.<sup>377</sup> Concomitant with the proletarianization of the artist, there is an “increase in the numbers of drab ‘non-production workers’ (middle-people)” including critics, dealers, curators, and so on, whose task is to promote, market, and sell art in commodity form.<sup>378</sup> Burn is particularly sensitive to the role the United States plays in enforcing a corporate culture “demanding a uniformity dominated by New York art” by insisting that artists “affirm and perpetuate at least one of the dominant styles” with its origins in New York.<sup>379</sup>

Like Ramsden, Burn voices concern that the agendas of many political art organizations might unintentionally support rather than contest this state of affairs. He categorically rejects goals that, if achieved, would perpetuate capitalism as much as they benefit artists because these would, in the end, reproduce the artist’s increasingly dire social situation, and in this respect he cites the National Art Workers’ Community’s proposals “to improve the socio-economic stance of the visual arts through: 1 improving the standard of living of the artist through expanding the demand for art; 2 promoting the recognition of the artist as a working professional.”<sup>380</sup> Burn

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid, pp. 152-153.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, p. 154.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, p. 154, p. 161.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, p. 158-159.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid, p. 163. Burn cites *Art Workers News* 4, no. 6 (September 1974) as his source for these proposals.

concludes his essay on “a note of guarded optimism” by hoping for “a distinctive consciousness and solidarity developing out of a ‘community of artists’.”<sup>381</sup>

There are two responses to this essay in the *Art-Language* article “‘Mr. Lin Yutang Refers to “Fair Play” ...?’.”<sup>382</sup> The first is presented in the hostile voice of “Professor Norman Trotsky” and the second in the milder voice of “Petrichenko.” The primary author of this text is Michael Baldwin, but, in accordance with the contributor list at the front of the issue, four other names are indicated as either co-authors or sympathizers with the authors’ views: Sarah Charlesworth, Charles Harrison, Harold Hurrell, and Lynn Lemaster. Baldwin’s disagreements do not concern Burn’s prescription of community — Sandra Harrison’s text “Pedagogical Sketchbook (AL),” which appears in the same issue of *Art-Language*, advocates in favor of a collectivity that in its broad outlines is similar to what those in New York support — but rather his diagnosis of the situation facing artists in New York, particularly his discussion of capitalism.<sup>383</sup> Specifically, Baldwin argues that artists are bourgeois and not, as Burn contends, working class, and furthermore, that artists are mistaken if they believe or act on a belief that they belong to the same social class as other laborers. Instead, Baldwin suggests that artists can achieve solidarity with the working classes only by first recognizing their own complicity as part of the bourgeoisie and acting in accordance with this insight.

“Professor Norman Trotsky” posits the following general argument about Burn’s article and the problem of class:

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid, p. 165.

<sup>382</sup> Art & Language, “‘Mr. Lin Yutang Refers to “Fair Play” ...?’,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): pp. 68-80.

<sup>383</sup> See Art & Language, “Pedagogical Sketchbook (AL),” *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): pp. 31-40.

The surmise that those contradictions that are faced by the artist may be resolved in a sort of penetrative artistic counter-culture without fundamental reference to the class struggle is a denial of the historical basis of social change. Artists are, variously, members of a social ‘section’ which, from an historical (class) point of view, is ‘indeterminate’. Every kid knows that this ‘section’ and its relatives fundamentally reflect capitalism. ‘While We’ve Been ...’ recommends that social transformation which gives security and comfort to the artist as petty-bourgeois and regrets the images of quasi-proletarianization that certain (strange) politico-economo-ethical observations provide.<sup>384</sup>

“Trotsky” also accuses Burn of avowing an individualist position in contrast to his ostensive desire for community by contending that Burn’s interest in restoring artists’ ownership of the means of production as a way to combat their proletarian position amounts to a nostalgic longing for a return to an earlier stage in the history of capitalism when artists were self-employed petty bourgeois, thus forestalling any move toward community: “Hankering after the petty-bourgeois anachronism (which is anti-dialectical) allows in the Heideggerian mystification which jargonizes as ‘inauthentic’ the ‘being-with-one-another.’”<sup>385</sup>

Two possible conclusions follow from this. First,

We (and Mr. Burn) are simultaneously functioning ‘outside’ monopoly capitalism (and we get the standard ‘alienation’ pitch) and living (at least Mr. Burn is ...) in a world of monopoly capitalism. [...] But Mr. Burn tells us ‘there’s nothing

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<sup>384</sup> Art & Language, “‘Mr. Lin Yutang Refers to “Fair Play” ...?’,” p. 70. “‘While We’ve Been ...’” refers to the first section heading of Burn’s “The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation” and is used throughout “Mr. Lin Yutang” to refer to Burn’s essay, likely because a final title had not been decided upon when Burn sent a draft of the text to England.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p. 70.



wrong with' his situation as petty-bourgeois — so his problem is not dialectical, his contradiction is not in alienation, he's outside, contradicting-away (reflexively) on his own.<sup>386</sup>

Alternately, "Mr. Burn is petty-bourgeois (and so are others), but soft: We're being proletarianized ... but mostly it's happening to other people (deluded modernists (?)). And the author doesn't want it to happen to him."<sup>387</sup> Either way, "Trotsky" positions Burn as an impotent individual lacking in class consciousness. Moreover, "Trotsky" ventures, "class dysfunction is not based entirely on economic struggle. The crisis, such as it is, is a crisis of socialization as such," and he accuses Burn of holding "a formal concept" of socialization, the "content" of which "is neither referred to nor considered."<sup>388</sup> In conclusion, "Trotsky" offers, "a demystifying meeting of the intelligentsia (sectional bourgeoisie), students and workers is only feasible insofar as the dialectic of social transformation is itself socialized."<sup>389</sup> This is to take place through "The 'maturing' of the conditions of socialism (or socialization for that matter)," which is both "the accumulation of the real conditions of an adequate consciousness" and "the product of the actions of the class 'for-itself'."<sup>390</sup> In essence, "Trotsky" hews a position close to Ramsden by avowing education, especially education that develops class consciousness and the creation of a class for-itself that is a historical agent rather than an effect of historical processes.

In keeping with Art & Language's playful use of names — reference to Lu Xun, author of the 1925 essay "On Deferring 'Fair Play'," a leftist response to the liberal Lin Yutang positions Baldwin to the left of Burn — the more moderate "Petrichenko," who led the Kronstadt

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

rebellion of 1921 that led Lenin to pronounce the New Economic Policy that same year, is less far left than “Trotsky.” He opens by calling “Trotsky” “a bit harsh,” but he too is skeptical of Burn’s argument about the art market.<sup>391</sup> Against “Trotsky’s” uniform vision of sociality as the historical process of classes coming to consciousness of themselves, “Petrichenko” argues for “not just one kind of socialization.”<sup>392</sup> “Petrichenko’s” concern is that socialization is “often in danger of being devoid of structural content” and “doomed to flicker about in a crystalline contradiction that remains merely decorative and inert ... or what ... worse?”<sup>393</sup> A footnote casts further doubts on “such confections as ‘Let’s construct art on the basis of “social criticism/praxis”’” and further criticizes “half-hearted ambiguities” that “come across as swashbuckling calls to arms.”<sup>394</sup>

As a way of moving forward with socialization, “Petrichenko” suggests concrete tasks including

the development of a strategy for sorting out the dialogical conditions of penetrating and participating in the class struggle; the provision of a feasible (and not a whining) self-critical alternative analysis of the situation and role of art practice; the provision of a self-active structure (or structures) within which artists can learn and act toward the realization of solidarity with activists in the class struggle — that doesn’t mean rotten institutions; getting-on with the problem of reflecting reality in respect of the ideology of the class struggle.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

“Petrichenko” breaks most strongly with “Trotsky” when he advocates avoiding “a fixation with class — as an immutable (non-dialectical) point of reference.”<sup>396</sup> A step toward a positive account of social transformation is given when “Petrichenko” avows that “An adaptive ‘undermining’ of the producer-consumer relation (in art)” must be “fundamentally a posterior apprehension of class dysfunction.”<sup>397</sup> Consciousness of class dysfunction, not class consciousness itself, is here offered as a direction forward.

Unsurprisingly, Burn did not acquiesce to these criticisms. In a response essay, “Strategy is Political: Dear M ...,” he calls attention to the way that class is organized differently in old world countries, such as England, with long established conventions regarding labor and sociality, and newer nations, including the United States and Australia, where class is less rigidly defined and social relationships are more commonly forged across class divisions.<sup>398</sup> In America, “if you treat class as a thing, there are classes [...]; as an experience, there aren’t. [...] The experiences necessary for the creation of working class consciousness haven’t existed.”<sup>399</sup> Australia “lacks any rigid class structure” and “the working class there has a petty bourgeois consciousness.”<sup>400</sup> Having established that his original article “was written in (for) socio-political conditions different from your own,” he dismisses Baldwin for making criticisms that do not apply within the context of the United States: “‘Capitalism is capitalism, that’s all we need to

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, pp. 77-78.

<sup>398</sup> Art & Language, “Strategy is Political: Dear M ...,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): pp. 81-86.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

know' is what you seem (Trotskying) to suggest. That is just to ignore the significance of the difficulties we encounter."<sup>401</sup>

Burn's insistence that "class isn't just a thing, a mere factor of your social relation to production, but a living experience" matters because

Postulating a revolutionary class plainly requires a model of social conflict involving class struggle. Perhaps it's feasible ... in some of the so called Third World countries. But in New World countries, the revolutionaries can't find the structural bases. [... I]n America, there hasn't even developed a trade union consciousness which is negative to capitalism.<sup>402</sup>

In New York, Burn suggests, "Practice is overwhelmed by a cultural 'reality'" that must be taken into consideration; in particular, he cites "a media-intensified intellectual division of labour" that "has virtually destroyed the practice of cultural criticism."<sup>403</sup> Burn describes Art & Language "talking a lot about an 'art' as an active agency in changing people and their social relations, about the ideological role of an 'art'" as a way to counteract this dearth of criticism.<sup>404</sup> He scolds his interlocutors in England for forgetting the importance of broadening this dialogue as widely as possible: "You know as well that the only hope of any sort of authentic (sic) practice lies in being able to keep our dialogue growing ... more conversations ... the moment we let it all go, fade away, we don't have any hope and can just as well be thrown onto the garbage heap of modern art."<sup>405</sup> Rather than opportunism, the charge Baldwin levels against Burn in this regard, Burn suggests that broadening Art & Language's sociality provides occasions for developing

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, p. 81, p. 83.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

new ideas about how to proceed as well as a broader audience to participate in shaping those ideas. In a second rebuttal, published in the second issue of *The Fox* as a review of the May 1975 issue of *Art-Language*, Burn turns the tables on Baldwin's criticism by making a thinly veiled assault on his individual, "psychologized (rather than socialized) personality coming to dominate community," as the real danger to Art & Language's future as a group.<sup>406</sup>

Burn presents his proposal for a constantly expanding sociality as an ongoing process that is appropriate and necessary if some kind of basis for class struggle and resistance to capitalism is to emerge in the United States, which, in addition to a rabid media culture, lacks a viable leftist political alternative comparable to England's Labour Party. Burn's proposal also represents a response to Baldwin's criticism that socializing lacks content. He concludes by positing that the search for a base for critical activity has yet to reach the stage of positing content and, for the time being, finds its politics in challenging modernism's mistakes about content in search of broader sociality and content appropriate to the situation in the United States: "far from indulging in utopian panaceas, we are, as it were, trying to practice (create) the conditions ... we haven't arrived at our own content. Subverting form-as-content is political, that's all. But we won't end up as more objects of history ... yet ..."<sup>407</sup>

Art & Language's English section hint in the direction of their own political program elsewhere in the May 1975 *Art-Language*. Sandra Harrison, citing Burn's question "BUT THROUGH REALIZING OUR SOCIALIZATION, MIGHT WE BE ABLE TO TRANSFORM OUR REALITY?," answers, bluntly "no. [...] The transformation of reality," she suggests instead, "will only take place as a result of proletarian-based revolution of the total economic

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<sup>406</sup> Ian Burn, "Art-Language, Volume 3 Number 2," *The Fox* 2 (1975): p. 53.

<sup>407</sup> Art & Language, "Strategy is Political: Dear M ...," p. 86.

structure.”<sup>408</sup> Of artists, Harrison says, “Artists are self-employed. They do not sell their labour. They do not receive salaries. They are supported in various ways. To use the language of proletarian class struggle is to sink into fantasy.”<sup>409</sup> A collaboratively authored text in the same issue of *Art-Language* proposes an alternative approach to allying art to political struggle:

Our tasks will be: 1) to establish appropriate forms of contact with self-active groups in working class movements (not necessarily ‘official’ ones); 2) the attempt to integrate the resulting dialogue in a reciprocal historic practice — so that the self-transformation of that practice avoids the socio-historical mistake of ‘permitting’ a merely marginal or adjustive response to the critical aspect of that dialogue. The task is, perhaps, in the first, instance, an ‘analytical’ one ... but that doesn’t mean we envisage a lot of people with clipboards and enthusiastically worried expressions.<sup>410</sup>

Burn, for his part, saw few if any practical consequences deriving from the English sections political proposals. In a private notebook from the period, he wrote, “ALUK — it’s hard to see how their words can become deeds.”<sup>411</sup>

Following this disagreement, Burn began to distance himself from Art & Language. He accepted teaching positions in San Diego and Halifax that took him away from New York for much of 1976. In San Diego, he created at least one Art & Language work: a poster that considers the relationship of art on the American west coast to art in New York in a manner analogous to Art & Language’s earlier work on Australia’s situation vis-à-vis the United States.

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<sup>408</sup> Art & Language, “‘To Begin With, While I am Clearly a Marxist Sympathizer ...’,” *Art-Language* 3, no. 2 (May 1975): p. 15.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>410</sup> Art & Language, “Art and Language,” *Art-Language* 3 no. 2 (May 1975): p. 41.

<sup>411</sup> Ian Burn, unpublished notebook, dated 1974-5, Ian Burn archives, Sydney, unpaginated.

Despite his increasing disillusionment with Art & Language, he continued to participate when in New York, and the social position he championed found considerable support within the collective there, as a number of Art & Language participants in New York, envisioning themselves as workers, advocated withdrawal from what they perceived to be a hopelessly bourgeois art world and began to form associations and alliances with other groups and collectives, some comprised of artists, others of a more directly activist orientation.<sup>412</sup> In reestablishing their social base, they hoped to find new audiences for Art & Language's work and draw strength from wider association with other politically oriented collectives. This provoked tensions within the collective, particularly with Baldwin. Corris, who was deeply involved in the politicization of Art & Language in New York, recounts the collective receiving "a postcard from the artist Lawrence Weiner bearing the cryptic message: 'a meeting is desired'" in the fall of 1975.<sup>413</sup> Weiner's overture drew Art & Language into a coalition of artists and critics, including Carl Andre, Leon Golub, Hans Haacke, Lucy Lippard, Miriam Schapiro, and many others affiliated with a variety of feminist and African-American groups, that became Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC).

Their first public statement, a broadside addressed "To The American Art Community from Artists Meeting for Cultural Change" and dated December 14, 1975, objects to the exhibition *Three Centuries of American Art*, drawn from the personal collection of John D.

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<sup>412</sup> Along these lines, see the sound recordings of Art & Language discussions from 1975 in the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institute, during which Art & Language discuss, among other topics, the possibility that, concomitant with the artist's proletarianization, artistic production has shifted registers, in Marxist terms, from superstructure to base, becoming a means by which relations of production reproduce themselves rather than a site of ideological conflict about how the relations of production will be organized.

<sup>413</sup> Michael Corris, "Inside a New York Art Gang: Selected Documents of Art & Language, New York" (1996) in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, p. 474.

Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup> and organized by the De Young Museum in San Francisco but scheduled for exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in September 1976. The AMCC “object to the collusion of the De Young and Whitney Museums and John D. Rockefeller III in using a private collection of art, with its discriminatory omissions, to promote upper class values and a socially reactionary view of American art.”<sup>414</sup> More specifically, they objected to the inclusion of “no Black artists and only one woman artist,” which they saw as an extension of the Whitney’s lack of “Black professional staff in curatorial or even sub-curatorial rank” and the absence of African-American and women artists in the museum’s exhibitions.<sup>415</sup> As a countermeasure, the broadside announces a picketing of the Whitney to take place on January 3, 1976 as “the first step in setting up a national network to protest such misuse of art and artists for the Bicentennial — and afterwards.”<sup>416</sup>

The third issue of *The Fox* contains a portfolio of statements by and about AMCC collected and presented by Charlesworth under the title “For Artists Meeting.” She introduces them by noting, “Some feel they have the answers; others are looking, and I often feel that it is in the uncertainty of our often naive and awkward search that we begin to approach the unfamiliar

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<sup>414</sup> Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, “To The American Art Community from Artists Meeting for Cultural Change,” broadside (December 14, 1975), n. p. This document is excerpted in Corris, “Inside a New York Art Gang” in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 474-475. It is also reprinted in full in Sarah Charlesworth, “For Artists Meeting,” *The Fox* 3 (1976): pp. 43-44.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, n.p.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, n.p. When actually exhibited, the exhibition bore the title *American Art: An Exhibition from the Collection of Mr. & Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup>*. Documentary footage of the protest appears in Zoran Popović’s film *Borba u Njujorku* (see Chapter Four). For the exhibition catalogue, see See E. P. Richardson, *American Art: An Exhibition from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup>* (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1976).



territory (discovery) which lies beyond conditioned response.”<sup>417</sup> Indeed, she further ventures that

rather than being ‘non-productive’ in terms of arriving at clear-cut ‘solutions’, such discussions and collective struggle toward understanding are not only valuable and healthy in terms of personal growth and change but provide in and of themselves, a *very tentative basis* of social change, through a process of social interaction which occurs *outside of* (but not independent of) specific institutional forms.<sup>418</sup>

Nearer the end of her introductory remarks, Charlesworth offers a succinct statement of position regarding the benefit of groups such as AMCC: “The process of our collective recognition of the ‘problems’ and our move toward their ‘resolution’ are one.”<sup>419</sup>

The regular congregations at Artists Space at 155 Wooster Street on Sunday nights at 8pm for the AMCC’s open meetings generated a number of statements. In addition to the Whitney boycott proposal, Charlesworth includes the AMCC Position Paper Committee “A Tentative Position Paper” presented at a meeting on February 22, 1976 that seeks to establish “a real and viable basis for continuing” to meet.<sup>420</sup> At the risk of becoming “a rather dull super-ad-hoc committee” after the Whitney protest, the authors propose that, in the absence of “a particular set of beliefs” held in common by the group, “a sense of uncertainty” is “where we begin.”<sup>421</sup> Given the number of Art & Language members whose initials appear at the top of the document, it is not surprising that, “With these problems in mind, the committee would like to

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<sup>417</sup> Charlesworth, “For Artists Meeting,” p. 40.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>420</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>421</sup> Quoted in Ibid, pp. 45-46.

recommend that the group devote a regular and considerable amount of time, to study, discussion, learning — as a group — seeing this dialogue as already being a step towards a new form of practice.” They propose this practice not “to detract from the continuous and careful attention to immediate, external problems, such as Whitney-type situations” but as a “long-germ function of the group” that would persist in the absence of such concerns.<sup>422</sup> In essence, this proposal, if it were adopted, would have remade the AMCC as an extension of Art & Language. They propose a particular set of topics for further consideration: “Art & Feminism, Collaboration, Imperialism, Artist as Intellectual, The Culture Industry, The role [sic] of Museums.”<sup>423</sup> The other papers Charlesworth includes takes up many of these issues, including contributions from Ginny Reath and Elizabeth Hess on feminism, Carolee Schneemann also on feminism, V. King on imperialism, and Leandro Katz on the role of men in the women’s movement.

Art & Language also associated with a Black Nationalist organization that called itself the Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union (AICU) and, from 1978 to 1981, published the Maoist journal *Main Trend*. Corris relates that during “the winter of 1975” the AICU “began to recruit members from AMCC” in order “to enlarge their social base to include SoHo artists to form a new, ‘mass organization.’”<sup>424</sup> This group set itself up, similarly to AMCC, as a coalition of groups and individuals with shared aims and interests, and the Congress of Afrikan People (CAP), one of the constituent groups, led by the poet Amiri Baraka, accounted for their name and direction as follows in a draft proposal for the organization’s “Principles of Unity”:

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<sup>422</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>423</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>424</sup> Corris, “Inside a New York Art Gang,” p. 477.

“Anti-Imperialist” because our class stand opposes Imperialism wherever it exists, “Cultural” in order to include all the arts and artists who through their creative labor take the raw materials found in the life of the people and shape them into the ideological form of literature and art serving the masses of the people, and “union” to reflect the proposed mass character of the organization. We unite to take action to end our oppression and exploitation caused by the system of Imperialism...<sup>425</sup>

Response to the New York section’s involvement in AMCC and the AICU was not positive in England. Baldwin did not share the CAP’s stance on the role of artists in the political process, and he dismissed the AICU as “Maoist pipsqueaks” for asserting that art must serve the people.<sup>426</sup> Ramsden was equally disaffected with what he took to be the wrongheaded politicization of art practice in New York. In an open letter to Art & Language dated August 10, 1975, he confesses, not without ironic romanticism,

I think today morality is split from action so decisively that praxis is almost a dream, compromise is an everyday necessity. Ah, how fucking intolerable. To be born moral but addicted to a surplus luxury — art. Moreover, elitist, avante-garde [sic] art! In a bare state of Kierkegaardian dread I know there is no way such an activity can be remotely politically effective.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Draft of the AICU’s “Principles of Unity” submitted by the Congress of Afrikan Peoples, quoted in Ibid, p. 477.

<sup>426</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 481.

<sup>427</sup> Mel Ramsden, open letter to Art & Language, dated August 10, 1975, Michael Corris papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Box 5, Folder 30. Excerpts from this letter appear in Corris, pp. 473-474.

Ramsden, who, in the same letter, claims a need “to break contact with ALUK,” which would effectively isolate him from the entire collective, would, shortly thereafter, begin to recognize his common ground with Baldwin.<sup>428</sup> In a retrospective account of AMCC and AICU published in *Art-Language* in October 1977, by which point Art & Language essentially consisted of just Baldwin and Ramsden, they persist in lamenting “Beleaguered art-world artists [...] fixated upon ‘radical politics.’”<sup>429</sup> Referring to AMCC, they write: “These artists are in no position either to volunteer to have, or to accept an invitation to have, the interests of the working class.”<sup>430</sup> Of AICU, they wager, “To threaten ‘non-proletarians’ with immanent [sic] ‘proletarianisation’ is not to keep anyone awake nights.”<sup>431</sup>

Unreceptive to what they felt to be naïve and jingoistic politics in New York, the English section began to consider reclaiming exclusive use of the Art & Language name. The largest obstacle was Joseph Kosuth, the erstwhile American Editor of *Art-Language*, and Baldwin gave Mayo Thompson, an American musician and artist, who began to associate with Art & Language in 1973 while living in England, the task of assuming distribution of *Art-Language* in New York upon his return there in 1975. Thompson, together with Burn and Ramsden, who, like Baldwin, resented Kosuth’s leveraging of his individual artistic success in Art & Language as well as his simultaneous claim for a radical reputation because of his participation in the group, devised a plan to oust Kosuth from Art & Language by convening a series of meetings at which collective authorship of all future work by participants would be a precondition for membership in Art &

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid p. 1.

<sup>429</sup> For Art & Language’s retrospective account of both AMCC and the AICU, see Art & Language, “‘Artists Meeting for Cultural Change’ and ‘Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union’: a history of two cultural organizations, as illustration,” *Art-Language* 4, no. 2 (October 1977): p. 66.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, pp. 71-72.

Language, something to which they presumed Kosuth would never agree. Enforcing collective authorship would also mean that the English section would have more oversight of what transpired in New York than ever before, which had the added for Ramsden of strengthening his alliance with Baldwin as well as his position within the New York section.

Hostility toward Kosuth had simmered for some time but came to a boil after Burn co-authored an article for the second issue of *The Fox* with Karl Beveridge, a new participant in Art & Language who arrived in New York from Toronto in 1969 with Carole Condé. Together, they became friendly with Burn and Ramsden and assisted with the second and third issues of *The Fox*. Beveridge and Burn's essay covertly attacks Kosuth in the guise of attacking the minimalist sculptor Donald Judd.<sup>432</sup> It begins with an overture: "Don Judd, is it possible to talk?" and continues to address Judd in the second person as with a series of questions.<sup>433</sup> Beveridge and Burn feel unable to talk with him because of his seeming inapproachability: "How do we deal with an almost sacrosanct figure, a reputation seemingly above ordinary criticism, a powerful reference point for so much during the sixties and apparently still 'fundamental' to a lot of high art produced today?"<sup>434</sup> To Beveridge and Burn, "You 'exist' in Castelli, in the Modern, in the Stedelijk, on Philip Johnson's front lawn."<sup>435</sup> They recount his famous allies and enemies — John Chamberlain, Robert Morris, Tony Smith, Barbara Rose, Michael Fried. "Is this what we are addressing? By addressing this are we addressing *you*?"<sup>436</sup> They address Judd not as a person but as a construction of the art world, asking him about his writings, his work, his theories about art, his favorite terms, what has been written about him, his political statements, his vocal

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<sup>432</sup> Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, "Don Judd," *The Fox* 2 (1975): pp. 129-143.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

attitudes about America and American art, and so on, citing his writings and statements along the way as if the text were an interview or dialogue.

Beveridge and Burn's questions mount up until they ask the key question: "Against all this, how could you see your work as *political*, as *subversive*?"<sup>437</sup> They quote Judd:

'So my work didn't have anything to do with society, the institutions and grand theories. It was one person's work and interests; its main political conclusion, negative but basic, was that it, myself, anyone shouldn't serve any of these things, that they should be considered very skeptically and practically.' And 'I've always thought that my work had political implications, had attitudes that would permit, limit or prohibit some kinds of political behavior and some kinds of institutions. Also, I've thought that the situation was pretty bad and that my work was all I could do.'<sup>438</sup>

Beveridge and Burn's questions become incredulous: "Do you still believe that? Do you still believe that the *individual* qua individual can be political or subversive? Haven't you realized that it is exactly what the interests dominating this society *want*, that it is its most insidious form of social control?"<sup>439</sup> They carry on in this manner before reaching the conclusion, "*You can't be subversive to institutions and at the same time presuppose a form of art which reproduces, thus increases, the power of those institutions. If you really want your art to be subversive, it must be a form of art which doesn't reproduce the Big Cultural Lie.*"<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid, p. 139. These passages are taken from Judd's comments in "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* (September 1970).

<sup>439</sup> Beveridge and Burn, "Don Judd," p. 139.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

A coda extends again the initial invitation: “By engaging your work and your writing, by trying to engage *you*, do we have anything to talk to each other about? Or have our actions precluded that possibility?”<sup>441</sup> Whether there ever was a genuine invitation to talk is unclear, but as a piece of strategy, “Don Judd” worked. Whether or not Kosuth realized that he was the “Don Judd” Beveridge and Burn addressed, the real Donald Judd read the essay and became deeply upset with Kosuth for allowing it to be published in a journal of which he was an editor. According to Beveridge, Judd rebuked Kosuth “through the dealer Leo Castelli,” who represented both of them at the time.<sup>442</sup> This, in turn, provoked Kosuth’s ire with Art & Language and set him at odds with the collective, creating ill will toward him and precipitating his exclusion from the group by pitting its sentiments against him. The issue of his individualism had been forced, and it could no longer be ignored.

A series of meetings was then organized in late February 1976 to discuss the future of the collective, and Burn, Ramsden, and Thompson used the occasion to maneuver against Kosuth and his supporters. Transcripts of the discussions are the lead item of the third and final issue of *The Fox*, under the editorship of “Peter Benchley,” a pseudonym rather than the popular novelist of the same name. Benchley was asked to present his “edited transcripts of the group’s proceedings during three ‘struggle session’ (sic) at the close of February, 1976. There were seven such sessions in all. I selected the first and the last two.”<sup>443</sup> The edited transcripts appear under the title “The Lumpen-Headache,” and Benchley indicates that present for the discussions were Michael Corris, Joseph Kosuth, Sarah Charlesworth, Karl Beveridge, Christine Kozlov, Ian

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>442</sup> Karl Beveridge, quoted in Clive Robertson, “The Art World and Its Other: Forever the Twain Shall Meet?” in Bruce Barber, ed. *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2008), p. 42.

<sup>443</sup> Peter Benchley, “The Lumpen-Headache,” *The Fox* 3 (1976), p. 3.

Burn, Carole Conde [sic], Mel Ramsden, Andrew Menard, Preston Heller, Jill Breakstone, Mayo Thompson, Nigel Lendon, Alex Hay *et alia*.”<sup>444</sup> In the transcripts, these names were replaced, apparently at Kosuth’s suggestion, with the names of different species of fish to conceal the identities of the participants, as many of the discussants kept fish as pets, though in a number of copies of *The Fox*, Kozlov and Paula Ramsden stamped a key connecting the discussants to their corresponding species, and the list of participants is the same as Benchley’s.<sup>445</sup> As Christopher Gilbert notes, “The level of malice in the group at this point is evident in the choice of a bottom feeder, *Ocellatus*, to describe Kosuth and ‘a medium-sized predator’ *Jarbua* (Terapon *Jaruba*, the Targetfish) to describe Charlesworth.”<sup>446</sup> That the real Peter Benchley is best known as the author of *Jaws* only amplifies the malice.

The first session begins with Ramsden introducing the core topic of “social change,” which has become the crucial problem facing Art & Language as both an insufficiently theorized topic and their supposed reason for continuing to work together as a collective.<sup>447</sup> With the floor open for debate, familiar topics resurface, including whether Art & Language’s social class prevents them from stimulating social change, whether the society in which they live prevents their work from having the effects they desire, whether they have a satisfactory understanding of their circumstances, and whether real alternatives — Ramsden proposes socialism — exist, are practical and practicable, and are open to Art & Language’s participation. Wide gulfs separate

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>445</sup> See Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, pp. 276-277n56.

<sup>446</sup> Christopher Gilbert, “Art & Language, New York, Discusses Its Social Relations in ‘The Lumpen-Headache,’” in Michael Corris, ed. *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 338.

<sup>447</sup> Quoted in Benchley, “The Lumpen-Headache,” p. 4.



the points of view that emerge. Charlesworth represents one extreme when she states her opposition to both socialism and communism:

I'm not interested in working for a dictatorship of the proletariat. I am interested in working for a society that would be truly egalitarian which has a whole different basis of social relations, that confronts the problems of capitalism [...]. And I think there are other problems, such as sexism and racism that are very much part of the problem, that just talking about the role of the working-class doesn't help clarify.<sup>448</sup>

Thompson, with faith in the historical inevitability of revolution, states the opposite: "the dictatorship of the proletariat [...] *is not up to us*. The working class will change things, will transform society."<sup>449</sup> The session continues as the discussion sways between these two extreme points of view. Divergent perspectives accumulate, but they are largely abstract; few concrete decisions are made, feasible strategies are lacking, and no definitive programs are introduced. Uncertainty and contradiction prevail. The session ends with Ramsden chastising the group for its insufficient understanding of Marx and asking rhetorically, "How can we, as petty-bourgeois perform a revolutionary function except insofar as we correlate our cultural demands with the economic and social demands of the base-class?"<sup>450</sup>

Benchley indicates that the second through fifth sessions concerned issues surrounding "internal group hierarchy, feminism, male-chauvinism, etc.," though he does not transcribe them.<sup>451</sup> From the opening of the sixth and penultimate session, the group's proposals become

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<sup>448</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>449</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>450</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

more concrete. Thompson begins, “We’ve been talking about unity and a lot of terminology has been bandied about. I’ve tried all week long to make clear that we are involved in a socialist process, something with which we have an active, ongoing relationship.”<sup>452</sup> Burn develops Thompson’s concern about unity into a need for “clear ideological direction. [...] Something we haven’t done in the past is take our form of organization very seriously. That’s been a disaster. We’ve had, really, a *laissez-faire* organization. [...] Either we stand still and have a non-progressive group, or we take organization seriously.”<sup>453</sup> Burn ignores Charlesworth’s valid suggestion “Or both” and continues: “What I would like to see is work start to all come out as Art & Language, without names, that includes articles and shows. I want, also, a mandate that you *can’t* do things as an individual. That makes the sociality into exploitation.”<sup>454</sup>

At this point, Kosuth, perhaps sensing a turn against his interests, stakes out his ground. He accuses those in the group desiring socialism of bad faith for relying on Art & Language as a means of financial support and individual entrée into the art world:

The economic, social, and psychological motives are propelling some of us toward a socialist program along lines that can transform in an immediate way our specific living and working context into a more equitable and beneficial arrangement. While these short-term means are important on the same human grounds that we have elected a long-term strategy for socialism, they do nevertheless constitute a kind of operational reformism insofar as they attempt to make life in the capitalist system acceptable. [...] I don’t understand why we should keep Art & Language? Keeping it for some of us is a form of keeping their

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<sup>452</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>453</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>454</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 12.

individual identity, and if particular individuals are asked to give up the power they think they have in the artworld as individual, then I think those whose individuality in the artworld rests upon the mantle ‘Art & Language’ should also be forced to change similarly.<sup>455</sup>

The solution he proposes — “I suggest we form a political party” — takes the socialist desires of Burn, Ramsden, and Thompson to their logical conclusion, effectively preempting their impending move against him by suggesting that the collective from which they are moving to exclude him will not enable them to achieve their political goals and that all are better off abandoning it in favor of politics.<sup>456</sup> At the same time, though, Kosuth is calling attention to his importance to the group as its best-known member; without him, the rest of Art & Language will lose their prominence as members of the collective in which he participates.

The discussion continues on along these lines, with Kosuth reiterating his dislike of collectivization — at one point invoking bureaucracy as a potential negative outcome — while Charlesworth also supports individual work on the grounds that it enables participants in Art & Language to contact others outside the group as potential new participants or at the very least as a larger audience for the collective’s work. Against this, Burn, Ramsden, and Thompson, increasingly joined by Corris, Menard, Heller, and others, insist on a more coherent platform and organizational structure for the group with socialism being a desired goal and guiding strategy.

At the beginning of the seventh and final session (the third transcribed), the cards are finally put on the table in the form of a series of provisions:

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<sup>455</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>456</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 14.

- 1) All work which is “made public” will be represented under the collective name. This applies to exhibitions, publishing articles, teaching and any other working which has a “public” form.
- 2) All work which is “made public” has to be discussed and accepted by the general body. This will set up a framework for criticism/self-criticism of work (something which has been lacking in the past). In this matter the will of the general body has to prevail.
- 3) Working “publicly” in an individualistic manner will be considered as self-disqualification from this process.
- 4) What are the implications of this for the economics of each of us?
- 5) What do we do about the question of expansion and the prospects of working with other people (this was subsequently changed to: our strength is based in our ideological struggle. New participation in the group is likely to emerge through development of working relations with existing participants.
- 6) Do we retain the name Art & Language?<sup>457</sup>

Tabled for future consideration were the possibility of “‘Decentralized’ (from New York City) working,” “‘the definition’ of collective work,” and the possibility of “‘thematic’ exhibitions.”<sup>458</sup> Before voting on the provisions, Thompson interjects, “I would like add one thing. I understand

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<sup>457</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>458</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 21.

that in addition to these provisos we unite around socialism ... an historic understanding thereof.”<sup>459</sup> Ramsden then proposes,

those who are in general agreement with the above provisos should form a splinter group to be called (Provisional) Art & Language. [...] Those not in agreement with the provisos can retain the name Art & Language. The issue must be made clear: we are not trying to push anybody ‘out’, we are simply trying to go on. In other words, those who want to stay in the position we’re in now, can retain the name Art & Language, those who want to go on must go on with a different name and with a new form of organization.<sup>460</sup>

The discussion now centers squarely on the future of Art & Language’s membership, and Kosuth, aware that he is being marginalized, proclaims, “I feel there’s a certain kind of social dynamic going on here and I have a hard time getting a fair hearing.”<sup>461</sup> There is some discussion of the clash between Kosuth and Burn. Kosuth laments how so many Art & Language participants seem to be siding against him, while Ramsden suggests that Kosuth has “never seen the social base of working,” while Burn “has been talking to a lot of other people” as an explanation for this.<sup>462</sup> As a vote looms, Ramsden states the case against Kosuth in straightforward terms:

you have always had, and we have always allowed you to have, a certain say as to what goes on in A&L but we’ve never had a say in what goes on in your work because as ‘an individual’ you have this pioneering attitude. Now let’s be

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<sup>459</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>460</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>461</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>462</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 22.

realistic, we have to have some organizational control over the way this group gets mined, the way people go into it and out of it and stop the opportunism. Now you are either going to be completely separate from A&L or completely in it and that's all that we're asking around the table. Not half and half.<sup>463</sup>

After some discussion about the individual provisions to clarify their implications, Ramsden asks, "Who's going to be here in 2 weeks and submit to the provisos of provo?" and Thompson follows, "Let's do it. Let's take our stands."<sup>464</sup>

The rest of the group, who all agree to the provisions, take Charlesworth's "I abstain" and Kosuth's "I half agree, I half abstain" as refusals to agree.<sup>465</sup> With the establishment of (Provisional) Art & Language — a knowing reference to the troubles in Northern Ireland and the Provisional IRA — Kosuth and Charlesworth were effectively blocked from future participation in the collective, and *The Fox*, which had been Kosuth's initiative, ceased publication after its third issue. The ultimate ramifications of Art & Language's decision played out over the year to come. They had gained a new purpose through total commitment to sociality as a means of proceeding with their work, but they lost the plurality — the pandemonium — that brought them to this point. There were now essentially two positions with real currency in Art & Language: one, with total support in England and increasing support from Ramsden and Thompson in New York, that envisioned Art & Language as an essentially petty-bourgeois group devoted to solidarity with the working class and collective learning about art, society, and the relations between them, and another, subscribed to by the rest of Art & Language's New York participants, that sought expanded sociality across class barriers as a means of leaving art behind

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<sup>463</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>464</sup> Quoted in Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>465</sup> Quoted in Ibid, pp. 36-37.

and engaging more directly in political activity. Without Kosuth and Charlesworth, the group lacked third or fourth alternatives, and without a fox-like mindset, these two incommensurable, hedgehog-like approaches found themselves in opposition and open conflict.

A series of humorous cartoons by Beveridge and Condé that appear in the final issue of *The Fox* capture the power struggles and disillusionments of the group as it descended into infighting, and they provide a dire picture of the New York section as its final months approached. Beveridge and Condé depict the trials and tribulations of two “‘foreign’ artists” named “Chuck” and “Kitty” (clearly *noms de plume* for themselves) presented like an episode in an ongoing adventure series, titled “The Edge of Edge.”<sup>466</sup> “Like thousands of others,” and like many of the other participants in Art & Language, “they came to New York seeking those elusive muses, fame and fortune.”<sup>467</sup> Dissatisfied with the “authenticity of their ‘quality’ avant-garde-kunst,” they fall in with the “Art & Languish” collective, who share their disillusionment with the art world, but Art & Languish are not without their own problems.<sup>468</sup> At Chuck and Kitty’s first meeting with the group, “The atmosphere was guardedly tense, ideas and information were cautiously ‘traded’. Some (no names) had a better position in the kunstmart, thus a better ‘trading value’, which no one challenged for fear of ‘power-failure.’”<sup>469</sup>

As Chuck and Kitty’s relationship with Art & Languish deepens, the group’s squabbles become increasingly pathetic. In one drawing, figures that closely resemble Burn, Corris, and Lendon complain about not being “consulted about the picnic.”<sup>470</sup> In another, a discussion about an Art & Languish “platform” involving five members, two of whom appear to be Kosuth and

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<sup>466</sup> Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, “The Edge of Edge,” *The Fox* 3 (1976): p. 80.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

Ramsden, in a room that bears a resemblance to Burn and Ramsden's studio at 250 Bowery devolves into complaints about the "W.C."<sup>471</sup> An AMCC ("Artists Mania for Confused Claptrap") meeting appears to offer no respite, as half-sketched figures scattered throughout the panel gripe about art in a riotous affair without anyone seemingly listening to anyone else.<sup>472</sup> The last panel, the end of the episode, seems to show Art & Languish agreeing to membership provisions, but a closer examination reveals that the topic being discussed is watering plants. The caption of this panel reads,

We'll leave Chuck and Kitty, Art & Languish, and their problems. Can they fight individualism and find unity in the capitalist world? How are they going to make ends meet? What are the concrete conditions they face? What, in fact, will they do? Can they develop a positive relation, given their cultivation and privileges, to the class struggle? Yes, the class struggle! And make no mistake, "When it comes to the revolution" it was heard said "*we know* we'll be up-against-the-wall-motherfuckers."<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, p. 84.



## **5.0 KEEP ALL YOUR FRIENDS**

(Provisional) Art & Language, the tenuous alliance of those participants in Art & Language who, in March 1976, adopted a series of provisions enforcing membership criteria, including strict collective authorship of all future work by participants in the group, lasted less than a year. Its termination coincides with the dissolution of the Art & Language section in New York. Ousting Joseph Kosuth and Sarah Charlesworth, who chose not to adopt the provisions, did little to resolve the group's tendency to factionalize. If anything, reducing the number of factions by one exacerbated remaining tensions, and divisions within the group that had been temporarily suppressed by the shared decision to adopt the provisions came to the fore almost immediately thereafter. Art & Language failed to reach a consensus on a workable direction for future work, and disagreement about how to conceive the relationship between art and politics proved to be the single most fractious issue. Two irreconcilable positions emerged, both of which share a far leftist orientation and a belief that the category of political art is insufficient as either politics or art, but the conclusions each faction drew from these commitments differed considerably. One faction preferred to remain within the art world and change it by challenging its recent pretensions to politics as politically retrograde, while the other faction, insisting that the art world is irredeemably bourgeois, proposed abandoning it, allying with dedicated political collectives, and attempting to win converts to their position from within the art world.

These factions were covertly on display in a June 1976 exhibition at John Weber Gallery that presented a selection of Art & Language's work from the preceding year but on the surface provided only glimpses into the contestations from which it emerged, as all the work appeared under the collective's name, concealing the presence of two separately authored bodies of work. Known as the "Music-Language" exhibition, this show included the first results of Art & Language's musical projects under that name. The album *Corrected Slogans* and the video *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors* both ridicule misdirected politics like the mockeries of Maoist self-criticism their titles suggest, and both played daily in the gallery at scheduled intervals. The exhibition also included a second body of work by Art & Language comprised of two documentary projects concerned with art institutions, and the producers of these works had no participants in common with those involved in the Music-Language projects. The first of these, *The Organization of Culture Under Self-Management Socialism*, emerged from collaborations between Art & Language and Yugoslavians affiliated with the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade and examined the complexities of Yugoslavian bureaucracy relative to art. The second, complimentary project, explores international relations and state-regulated culture from another angle. *The Organization of Culture Under Monopoly Capitalism* investigates the recently passed Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act, which made available to American museums federal funds from the United States government for the purpose of paying insurance costs for art exhibitions, thereby providing the State Department with oversight of cultural contact between the United States and other nations loaning works to American museums and American museums sending works abroad. By bringing together two distinct perspectives on the relationship between art and politics — the deep skepticism of the Music-Language experiments and the committed advocacy of the documentary projects — the June 1976 John Weber Gallery exhibition provides key

insights into the tensions growing within (Provisional) Art & Language, by the end of the year, led the group to dissolve.

At the center of the musical projects is Mayo Thompson, whose musical career began with the formation of The Red Krayola (originally, The Red Crayola) in Houston, Texas during 1966. Backed by drummer Frederick Barthelme and bassist Steve Cunningham, he led the band's original incarnation as guitarist and vocalist. In this initial lineup, the band performed experimental music that drew on psychedelic rock, avant-garde jazz, and contemporary classical music. Albums *The Parable of Arable Land* and *God Bless the Red Krayola and All Who Sail with It* appeared in 1967 and 1968 respectively on the International Artists label. The band recorded a third album entitled *Coconut Hotel* in 1967, but the label rejected it as insufficiently commercial, delaying its release until 1995. In 1969, Thompson recorded a solo album entitled *Corky's Debt to His Father* for the Texas Revolution label. Backed by studio musicians he performs more song-oriented efforts than the experimental work of The Red Krayola. Thompson then followed Barthelme to New York, where the latter, now an aspiring artist, had made contact with Kosuth, contributed to the second issue of *Art-Language*, and become involved in conceptual art, though he eventually changed his focus to literature and became a fiction writer.<sup>474</sup> Thompson provided illustrations to Barthelme's first collection of stories, *Rangoon*.<sup>475</sup> Shortly thereafter, he relocated again, to England, where his own involvement with Art & Language began. In 1975, he returned to New York, where he continued to pursue musical projects with Art & Language. Though they initially released the results of their collaborations under the name Music-Language, Art & Language's musical projects featuring Thompson have

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<sup>474</sup> Frederic [sic] Barthelme, "Three from May 23rd, 1969," *Art-Language* 1, no. 2: pp. 8-10.

<sup>475</sup> Frederick Barthelme, *Rangoon* (New York: Winter House Ltd., 1970).

subsequently appeared when reissued as collaborations with The Red Krayola, which Thompson officially reformed in the late 1970s in England after taking a job as a record producer with Rough Trade Records, and the band has undergone several permutations since, resulting in five Art & Language and The Red Krayola albums to date as well as an unfinished opera entitled *Victorine*.<sup>476</sup>

Thompson describes the origins of his musical collaboration with Art & Language stemming from his interest in setting to music language that is not typically lyrical in character:

When I first met Art & Language, [...] I gave them a copy of my solo album, *Corky's Debt To His Father*, and they said, "It's kind of personal isn't it?" I said, "Something wrong with that? You got another idea?" They said, "Yeah, we could try a whole new thing." I said, "OK, give me some lyrics and I'll put them to music and we'll see what happens." Next thing I know I get four pieces of text through the mail. Sure enough, when I started working on it I thought, this is a new language for me. I was also convinced by that time that you could put anything to music, language-wise, so I thought, Yeah, let's see.<sup>477</sup>

The language put to music in *Corrected Slogans* and *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors* draws equally from the lyrical tropes of socialist worker's songs, the rhetorical strategies of political speeches, and the terminological jargon of Marxist philosophy, all of it kept in abeyance when sung knowingly to musical settings. From Art & Language's perspective, music provided a new outlet that proved particularly versatile, allowing them to introduce comedy into their work, both in terms of lyrical content and the unrehearsed or even improvised spirit in which much of the

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<sup>476</sup> The libretto of *Victorine* appears as *Art-Language* 5, no. 2 (March 1984).

<sup>477</sup> Mayo Thompson quoted in David Keenan, "The Merry Prankster," *Wire* 258 (August 2005): p. 37.

music is performed, without sacrificing either their rigor or acuity. Comedy, in turn, toned down the alleged hostility of Art & Language's work by softening the accusatory prose of their rebukes with melodies more likely to elicit an audience's sympathies. Music also, at least potentially, provided them with new audiences, though their subversion of the musical tropes they deploy, like their play with political language, denies the populist appeal of popular music and corrupts the traditions of classical music.

Michael Baldwin wrote most of the lyrics for the 21 songs that comprise *Corrected Slogans*, and the process of writing, rehearsing, and recording the record stretched from 1973 to 1976 and took place in England, New York, and Captiva, Florida, where Thompson and his partner Christine Kozlov worked as Robert Rauschenberg's studio assistants. Pressed on vinyl and released in New York in an initial run of 1000 copies in 1976, the album, in its original pressing, features, pasted onto blank white covers with a blank spine, two pieces of paper, one on the front and another on the back, providing additional credits. In accordance with the provisions Art & Language adopted, however, none of the regular participants in the collective are credited. The only names given are those of the recording engineers, mixers, and Jesse Chamberlain, the drummer, whom Thompson met at Big Apple Recording in New York at 112 Greene Street in SoHo in 1975 and who subsequently drummed for The Red Krayola. On the album, Thompson plays guitars, keyboards, and synthesizers; Chamberlain plays drums; and the vocalists include, in addition to the instrumentalists, Michael and Lynn Baldwin; Charles, Sandra, and Orlando Harrison; Pauline Harrison (no relation); Harold Hurrell; Philip Pilkington; and Mel Ramsden. Much of Thompson's contribution to the record occurred before he began associating with the New York-based participants in Art & Language, and, of them, only Ramsden, who provided the vocal track on the song "Penny Capitalists," contributes.

The individual songs on *Corrected Slogans* are broadly divisible into two categories. Most are variations on pop songs, sung to melodies Thompson wrote, while four others are speeches performed with musical backing, usually a repetitive figure played either on guitar or piano, often with a drum part. Those in the latter category are relatively clear statements of position with regard to politics and society. “Harangue,” for instance, provides a reading of the current political situation as “a further entrenchment of reaction and the growth of mass repression” without “a conscious socialist transformatory alternative.”<sup>478</sup> An unidentified male speaker suggests, “What is needed is an integration of the ideology of socialism ... socialist ... transformatory sections ... with the industrial working class. / Socialist-working class solidarity is historical leadership identity.” As a harangue, the aim of the song is to stimulate anger and mobilize action, with the driving and heavily distorted guitar track backing it serving an incentive in this general direction.

The three remaining spoken tracks complicate the conception of solidarity expressed in “Harangue” with warnings about unscrupulous association. “Don’t Talk to Sociologists...” cautions against alliances with sociologists and anthropologists, who, because of their disciplines’ “historical role within bourgeois ideology,” are unable to provide “an analysis or even a picture of our conditions of exploitation.” This is followed by a warning not to “unite artists [...] If you or they are made to think that there’s a ‘rational core’ [...] in support of the view that ‘society’ is maintained harmoniously — rather than by exploitation and force: violence.” The track “Organization” issues similar warnings with regard to class: “The organization of activity into social and critical action will be no more than degenerate if it

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<sup>478</sup> All lyrics from *Corrected Slogans* are quoted from the liner notes of the 1997 reissue of the album on compact disc, which are without pagination. See Art & Language and the Red Crayola, *Corrected Slogans* (Drag City/Dexter’s Cigar, 1997), CD.

remains in the realm of participatory conflict.” The female voice reciting this speech argues in favor of “transition” before “allegedly progressive smart people” and “the people they feel sorry for” have any mutual class ground on which to collaborate “against the institutional ideology.” In the fourth and last of the spoken tracks, “Penny Capitalists,” Mel Ramsden provides “The careless purveyors of high culture” with two options: either “to be fixed as the harmless class, the dangerous harmless class” or to “recognise that they are a non-working, not-working class — penny capitalists — and ask themselves what that means: become people in process.”

The lyrics to “Penny Capitalists” are excerpted from a small, square, staple-bound pamphlet entitled *The Intellectual Life of the Ruling Class Gets its Apotheosis in a World of Doris Days* authored by Baldwin that, across six pages, excoriates the Venice Biennale as “a necrotic extremity” of the ruling classes.<sup>479</sup> (Provisional) Art & Language were soon to exhibit in this very exhibition, and their participation would be characteristically antagonistic. Copies of the pamphlet were made available at the John Weber Gallery exhibition and in Venice. Deploying particularly fiery rhetoric, Baldwin characterizes artists’ “attempts to fix forever their relations with ‘the rest of the world’, irrespective of social change” as “the last defensive gasp of entirely static instruments of capitalism ... in the effort to be better fed by its masters.”<sup>480</sup> The artist, Baldwin suggests, must “learn to function on class lines, recognizing that the requirement for ‘realism’ includes his own social sectionality [...] ‘Practice’ has got to be projective — but artists (given the distribution of function) must earn class activity given a scrutiny of the logic and the phenomenology of class analysis and mediated as a class history of ideology.”<sup>481</sup> The

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<sup>479</sup> (Provisional) Art & Language, “*The Intellectual Life of the Ruling Class Gets Its Apotheosis in a World of Doris Days*” (Banbury: Art & Language Press, 1976), front cover.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

task Baldwin here presents for artists is not to join prematurely with the working classes but to carefully and patiently examine their own class position in the belief that alliances with the working classes will ultimately be of no use unless artists first work out their own dependence on and support for the bourgeoisie. The artist's status as "an economic hors concours ... avails no one of a glimpse of 'freedom'." <sup>482</sup> Rather than seek a false notion of freedom, "one wants to find intellectual and deontic constraints" that reveal the conditions of social life and make genuine political action possible. <sup>483</sup>

The more melodic songs on *Corrected Slogans*, which draw from classical *Lieder* and pop singles for instrumentation and vocalization, are softer and allow the comedic tendency in Art & Language's work to express itself by satirizing naïve utopian fantasies that often plague political art. They provide a lighter counterpoint to the sentiments expressed in Baldwin's pamphlet and the angrier spoken tracks. "Keep All Your Friends" mocks aspirations of being "fed breakfast in bed and served by a fat millionaire." "Ergastulum" chides those who "want to be free, / Free: like a bird in a tree." The refrain "tio-tio-tio-tio-tinx," appropriated from Aristophanes' play *The Birds* appears in both "The Mistakes of Trotsky... Thesmophoriazusae" ("Thesmophorazusae" is itself a reference to Aristophanes' play of that name) and "What Are the Inexpensive Things the Panel Most Enjoys? ... An International." References to *The Birds* are appropriate as this play can be interpreted as an allegory for the kind of naïve utopian fantasy that Art & Language are working against. In the play, a pair of disaffected Athenian citizens mobilize the oppressed class of birds to build a city in the sky, appropriately named Νεφέλοκοκκυγία (Cloudcoocooland), between the gods and the mortals allegedly so that the

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<sup>482</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid, p. 3.



birds can regain their supposed rightful rule over both groups, but throughout the play, Aristophanes hints that the main protagonist Pisthetaerus, himself transformed into a bird at one point, harbors ulterior motives and is simply using the birds to advance his own ambitions for power. The play ends with a ceremony at which Pisthetaerus is presented Zeus' scepter by Sovereignty, Zeus' mistress, whom he also marries as the birds proclaim him their king.

This comedic direction extends into *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors*, a video produced entirely in New York using lyrics written by Ramsden. It was intended for classroom use, and Ian Burn showed it to his students in Halifax, while Terry Smith screened it for audiences in New Zealand, though it was not widely adopted in this role. Shot handheld with minimal editing and camera movement on black and white video by the participants, the definitively unfinished work compiles nine untitled songs performed by Thompson and Chamberlain on combinations of guitar, organ, accordion, and drums, mostly in a slapdash rock idiom, while Kathryn Bigelow, Ian Burn, Kozlov, Nigel Lendon, Mel and Paula Ramsden, and Terry Smith, in various combinations, speak or sing, usually in atonal voices, criticisms of "gross and conspicuous errors" of a political nature. "It is a G&CE to desire socialism with capitalist desire," Burn sings at the opening of the first song. "Capitalism," Lendon clarifies, "is in the mode of thought itself." Trading lines, Burn sings, "It reveals itself in the preposterous reification of psychology," to which Lendon adds, "as if psychology is discrete and ontologically distinct from ideology." Burn and Lendon continue reciting alternating lines, losing whatever melodic line they initially used in a gradual transition from singing to speaking voices, to consider the role that separation plays in capitalist society, arguing that the disunion effected by capitalism permits it to impose its own form of unity on society but that, in the end, no one can "put the world back together again." This is black comedy, made even blacker when performed

to Thompson's wordless crooning in the background, which recalls doo-wop, over his own gentle guitar arpeggios and Chamberlain's soft drumming: harmless music to accompany a dark message.

Other G&CEs include Mel Ramsden's complaints about people treating Marx's axiom, according to which "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it," as "a gung-ho call to arms." Burn singles out attempts "to try to realize an activist epistemology by luxurious abstract jesting" rather than in "the day-to-day struggles of all of us..." — and, here, the rest of the performers join Burn to sing a ham-fisted fist-raising "...together!" Mel Ramsden, while Burn whistles birdcalls, inveigles against the G&CE of "aggrandizing and individuating self" that impedes the development of "significant organizational forms." Bigelow, Kozlov, and Paula Ramsden caution against regarding "language as a classless means of communication," which, they contend, "belongs to the managers." Burn also performs a version of this song, grunting gruffly while wearing sunglasses. Sandwiched between the two versions are two versions of a different song featuring the refrain "we must ferociously attack," which is, after each utterance, followed by items from a list of things impeding political action, including "so-called institutionalized egalitarianism" and "our social base here in New York." In the first version, Burn, Kozlov, and Mel and Paula Ramsden sing together in an even, repetitive staccato, identifying "personalized forms of sociality organization" as "the G&CE of left-leaning thinking"; in the second, Burn, Lendon, and Smith sing rounds, building lyric upon lyric but breaking down before announcing the G&CE. In the final song, Smith assists an unidentified woman in the performance of a text that criticizes as a G&CE "Earnest chatter about sociality [...] without conscientious deconstruction of capitalist taxonomy cognition."

The specific political mistakes Art & Language identify are less important than the overall tone of their performance, in which it is often difficult to tell whether the performers are chastising mistakes or using sarcasm to chastise those who chastise mistakes. Suspending such language as “a belief is an approximated correspondence between daft, reified mind and the fetishized social reality of the commodity” in the medium of a song has an inherently disorienting effect, as vocabulary and phrasing that would be difficult enough to follow in writing or plain speech become nearly impossible to assimilate on a single viewing let alone to assimilate with previous lines and ponder before another, equally complex line follows. The language dissolves into jargon and, ultimately, purely material sound, musically interchangeable with the instrumentation to which it is set, and any rhetorical value of the words collapses into the rhetoric of the performance, which is alternately melodic, particularly when Mel Ramsden wildly gesticulates and incants in a priestly manner, as if pontificating from a soapbox before a crowd lit up with revolutionary fervor, and monotone, as in Burn’s solo recital or the song voiced plaintively by Bigelow, Kozlov, and Paula Ramsden, as though soberly taking stock of the situation in a hopeless, helpless demeanor. By taking on the position of pop stars but doing so in a largely unrehearsed and thoroughly unmusical fashion, Art & Language equate political grandstanding with celebrity, which they deflate with ironic mocking of political language within the confines of a collective sociality that they offer as already more productive politically than pamphleteering, sloganeering, or protesting — a paradoxical redemption. The group is simultaneously enraptured with politics and thoroughly bored with its banality, predictability, and inefficacy, and in *Corrected Slogans* and *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors*, the discourse of the far left loses its literal significance until its futility itself becomes productive.

None of the participants in the Music-Language projects worked on the other works shown as parts of the June 1976 John Weber Gallery exhibition. All of these take up themes of nationality and nationalism relative to art. Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge contribute a small work entitled *What Would Canada Do Without a Flavin*, that appropriates a *New York Times* article by culturally conservative critic Hilton Kramer containing a photograph of artworks, most of them in styles that recall American high modernism, minimalism, and post-minimalism, in the collection of the Canadian Art Bank, a government program in Condé and Beveridge's native country that purchases art and supplies it to government buildings and offices.<sup>484</sup> Beneath this is a text by Condé and Beveridge that advocates the need to politicize art. It reads, "What Would Canada Do Without a 'Flavin'? / 1) Make Its Own (Bourgeois Nationalism). / 2) Struggle to Expropriate the Expropriators of National Culture (Proletarian Internationalism)." Condé and Beveridge, who had been good friends of Burn and Ramsden after relocating to New York from Toronto in 1969, were drawn into Art & Language as the collective's work became more explicitly political in character. They abandoned their own individual practices as sculptors shortly after their involvement with Art & Language deepened, and for a 1976 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, they created considerable controversy, including the resignation of board members and the withdrawal of sponsorship of the galleries in which they exhibited, by showing not the minimalist sculpture for which they were known in Canada — Beveridge had been collected by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery of Ontario prior to the couple's move to New York — but a collaboratively-produced series of photographic and text-based works about the politics of the art world in New York as seen from their perspective as Canadian artists involved with Art &

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<sup>484</sup> Hilton Kramer, "Yankee Go Home," *New York Times* (June 6, 1976): pp. 1, 27.

Language. This exhibition culminated in the publication of *...It's Still Privileged Art* (1976), a book of cartoons and texts about Condé and Beveridge's lives in New York and their political struggles there as artists. The work's title refers not only to the art of their peers but also their own work, which, even if politicized, remains, in their consideration, privileged and politically insufficient.<sup>485</sup>

Another project with international implications shown at Art & Language's John Weber Gallery exhibition concerns the function of art in Yugoslavia. This project was set into motion when the Yugoslavian artist and filmmaker Zoran Popović and his partner, the critic Jasna Tijardović, arrived in New York from Belgrade during 1974 and quickly made contact with Kosuth, who provided them with access to studio space at 24 Bond Street in the NoHo neighborhood during their initial year-long stay in New York. They soon began a collaboration with Art & Language that culminates in Popović's documentary film *Борба у Нјујорку* (*Borba u Njujorku* or *Borba u New Yorku* in Latin script and *Struggle in New York* in English translation), filmed during a second visit in 1976, which concerns radical art in New York and captures the factional lines along which the Art & Language group there dissolved.<sup>486</sup> Despite fundamental differences in their situations as practicing artists, the collaboration between Popović, Tijardović, and Art & Language enabled its participants to comparatively analyze the conditions of artistic production in New York and Belgrade with a focus on social, political, economic, and institutional factors. For Art & Language, this gave rise to *The Organization of Culture Under*

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<sup>485</sup> Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, *...It's Still Privileged Art* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1976).

<sup>486</sup> See also Zoran Popović, *Borba u New Yorku* (Zagreb: Centar za fotografiju film i TV, 1977), which is a booklet version of the film. When possible, all citations from the film will refer to this printed reference.

*Self-Management Socialism*, which resulted directly from a brief October 1975 visit to Belgrade by Jill Breakstone, Corris, and Menard that Popović and Tijardović facilitated.

The Yugoslavia from which Popović and Tijardović arrived was uniquely positioned within the political alliances and hostilities of the Cold War. Though an Eastern European socialist state, albeit one with a mixed economy that included a private sector, Yugoslavia was not a signee of the Warsaw Pact and thus remained unaligned with Moscow. László Beke notes, “Yugoslavian artists often considered themselves not eastern but southeastern European. This orientation reflects the country’s cultural ties to Italy and Austria, as well as its relative independence from Moscow under the leadership of Marshall Tito.”<sup>487</sup> Though more open to the West than other socialist states in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia was not aligned with the United States or Western Europe either. Aleš Erjavec describes Yugoslavia playing “the Cold War blocs against each other while retaining a shaky equidistance from them.”<sup>488</sup> Yugoslavia was also, with India, Egypt, Ghana, and Indonesia, a founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, which provided diplomatic and trade relations for nations not under the sway of Washington or Moscow. International travel played an important role for Yugoslavian artists, and Western publications and visitors from the West were permitted. In addition to their diverse set of international connections, Yugoslavia was, as Lutz Becker notes, possessed of “internal internationalism” that comprised five federal republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and

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<sup>487</sup> László Beke, “Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art” in Luis Camnitzer, et. al. *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>488</sup> Aleš Erjavec, “Neue Slowenische Kunst — New Slovenian Art: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Self-Management, and the 1980s” in Aleš Erjavec, ed., *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art Under Late Socialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003), p. 136. See also, in the same volume, Miško Šuvaković, “Art as a Political Machine: Fragments on the Late Socialist and Postsocialist Art of Mitteleuropa and the Balkans,” pp. 90-134.

Montenegro.<sup>489</sup> Contacts between artists living in these republics helped to foster a sophisticated art scene in Yugoslavia, including a strong predilection for conceptual art borne out of the many international connections Yugoslavian artists had.<sup>490</sup>

The Yugoslavian variety of conceptual art with which Popović and Tijardović involved themselves had almost no profile in New York when they arrived there. The few artists known were known in only a cursory fashion. In 1970, curator Kynaston McShine included work by the Ljubljana-based OHO group in the exhibition *Information* at The Museum of Modern Art, one of the first major museum surveys of conceptual art.<sup>491</sup> This same collective, who came to a linguistically and graphically oriented conceptual art concerned primarily with place first through their own Reism movement, a Fluxus-like approach to object making and performance, and later through Land art, also appears as one of the few Eastern European inclusions in Lucy Lippard's survey of conceptual art, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object, 1966-1972*.<sup>492</sup> However, by the time Popović and Tijardović arrived in New York, OHO and other

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<sup>489</sup> Lutz Becker, "Art for an Avant-Garde Society: Belgrade in the 1970s" in IRWIN, ed. *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall Books, 2006), p. 391.

<sup>490</sup> On conceptual art in Yugoslavia, see Miško Šuvaković, "Conceptual Art" in Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, eds. *Impossible Histories: Historical avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 210-245. See also Miško Šuvaković, *Konceptualna Umetnost* (Novi Sad: Muzej Savremene Umesnosti Vojvodine, 2007), which provides a global account of conceptual art and includes an especially substantial treatment of Yugoslavian and Eastern European conceptual art. See, in particular, the section on Zoran Popović (pp. 325-328) and the chapters on Joseph Kosuth (pp. 389-425) and Art & Language (pp. 426-497).

<sup>491</sup> Kynaston McShine, *Information* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970), pp. 98-102. On OHO, see Igor Zabel, "A Short History of OHO" in IRWIN, ed., pp. 410-432. See also, the OHO manifesto: Marko Pogačnik and I.G. Plamen, "OHO Manifesto" (1966) in Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl, eds. *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York; Cambridge, MA; and London: The Museum of Modern Art and The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 92-95.

<sup>492</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966-1972* (1973) (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 152-153.

Yugoslavian art groups such as (EKÔD, whose members translated texts by participants in Art & Language, had abandoned art or ceased to exist owing to their disillusionment with conceptual art, which, according to Popović and Tijardović, many Yugoslavian artists felt to have been, in their final analyses, “just a perpetuation of the Western bourgeois tradition.”<sup>493</sup> This feeling stems from visits to Yugoslavia by Western artists including Joseph Beuys and Daniel Buren, which “proved negatively catalytic for many of us, mainly because of the amount of money associated with each artist.”<sup>494</sup> Popović and Tijardović cite the specific case of (EKÔD encountering “‘conceptual’ works priced in the range of \$10,000” at the Biennale de Jeunesse in Paris during 1972.<sup>495</sup>

Popović, Tijardović, and others persevered, however, by reorienting conceptual art in an explicitly political direction and aligning it with the stated goals of the Yugoslavian state, in particular the principle of self-management. Erjavec explains that, in theory, “the aim of self-management was to allow for decision making at the lowest possible level and to make social relations and decisions direct and transparent.”<sup>496</sup> This goal was foundational for the Student Cultural Center (SKC) at the University of Belgrade with which Popović and Tijardović were closely involved and which was the main hub for conceptual art activity in Belgrade during the 1970s. Tom Marioni, who visited Belgrade in 1974, described the SKC as

the main gallery of contemporary art in Belgrade... located near the center of town in an old police building that was obtained during a student revolt in 1968. It

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<sup>493</sup> Zoran Popović and Jasna Tijardović, “A Note on Art in Yugoslavia,” *The Fox* 1 (1975): p. 50.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>496</sup> Erjavec, “Neue Slowenische Kunst — New Slovenian Art: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Self-Management, and the 1980s,” p. 138.



has a theater, a lounge that serves Turkish coffee and soft drinks, lecture halls, a book store, a library and a gallery.<sup>497</sup>

Becker visited Belgrade in 1975 and, with Popović among his assistants, produced a documentary film about the SKC entitled *Kino Beleške (Film Notes)* that captures its politicized direction. In the film, Dunja Blažević, who directed the SKC gallery at the time, discusses the application of self-management principles to art:

I will talk about the mechanisms for socialising art. In our country there existed so far two ways in which works of art could be financed or bought: publicly or privately. Both are examples of currently dominant property relationships, which reflect clearly the socio-economic basis on which this art come into being, developed, functioned. A third model is being created now; it is the self-management system of free exchange and co-operative work, through work communities, which basically represents a new attitude towards property ... In order to develop a new relationship between art and society it is necessary to examine and analyse the existing models for working and behaving ... As long as we transport art works from studios into basements and closets, treating them like still-born children, as long as we are creating, through the private market, our own version of petit-bourgeois, we have an art, which is a social appendix, something that does not serve anything or anybody. It is something that is outside our social practice, outside self-management. It is impossible to make new art for a new

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<sup>497</sup> Tom Marioni, “Real Social Realism” in *Vision 2* (1976): p. 9. The second issue of *Vision*, a magazine edited by Tom Marioni and published out of San Francisco through Crown Point Press, is devoted to Eastern European art. On *Vision*, see Gwen Allen, *Artists’ Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011), pp. 308-309.

society on the mental level and with the political instruments of a feudal or bourgeois structure.<sup>498</sup>

Popović does not necessarily agree with Blažević's optimism about the ideal of self-management despite the title of his essay "For Self-Management Art."<sup>499</sup> First published in a bulletin called *October 75* brought out by Popović and others in the orbit of the SKC, the text considers the relationship between art and society and the role of technocracy and bureaucracy in the "world of art."<sup>500</sup> Popović opens the essay by considering how "inherited (artistic) practice, the existing state-administrative bureaucracy, as well as the existing liberalism" in Yugoslavia promote a general belief "that art is independent of ideology."<sup>501</sup> Popović conceives of a technocracy that is allied to a bureaucracy and "divides society (the cultural public) into the 'elite' and the 'masses,' into active and passive ones, into those who govern and those who are being governed."<sup>502</sup> One way this technocracy exerts power is through "'universal' aesthetic values" that Popović describes as "the values of the conflictless spectacular art of the bourgeois consumer society based on the type of values of the petite bourgeoisie, due to the established balance of power," and this, he claims, "finally functions on behalf of the preservation of the hegemony of Western culture over world culture in line with tendencies of late capitalism, and

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<sup>498</sup> Quoted in Becker, "Art for an Avant-Garde Society: Belgrade in the 1970s," p. 397.

<sup>499</sup> Zoran Popović, "For Self-Management Art" (1975) in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 846-849.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid, p. 847.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, p. 847.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid, p. 848.

its imperialistic needs and aims.”<sup>503</sup> Paradoxically, this “artistic liberalistic technocracy” abhors ideology but itself “establishes the bourgeois ideology in practice.”<sup>504</sup>

Against artists in Yugoslavia whose understanding of their place within the distribution of labor Popović finds wanting because it is too easily appropriated and oriented by technocracy and bureaucracy, he proposes,

a radical critical attitude regarding the artistic practice so far; because of this transcending of the existing artistic conformity (the existing sociability), in which formal changes took place, and in which one artistic context was exchanged for another whereas the establishment did not change, i.e., the establishment which essentially defines the functions of art, and functions of the artists.<sup>505</sup>

Popović gestures toward “the Marxist understanding of art” as “the politicization of art,” which he opposes to “the aesthetics of politics” in “the Fascist sense.”<sup>506</sup> Popović argues that “‘universal’ aesthetic values” promote the aestheticization of politics because the artistic bureaucracy that supports them “directs and ‘arranges’ artistic productivity and the relations of production.”<sup>507</sup> By taking control of the means and relations of production away from artists, “The bureaucracy creates an inert artist and a passive consumer of art, it creates ‘gaily tempered robots,’ with the help of its monopoly over information and education.”<sup>508</sup> In short, no actual self-management is occurring.

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid, p. 848.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid, p. 848.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid, p. 848.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid, p. 849.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid, p. 848-849.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid, p. 849.

Popović suggests, as a remedy to this situation, a politicization of art that will begin when “We, the artists, [...] seriously reexamine our allies, our interests, our work, our role and our real social position.”<sup>509</sup> Popović identifies the chief difficulty impeding both this reexamination and any actual practice of a politics of art in “the fact that new artistic suppositions become known to the public only if they correspond with the system of the artistic bureaucracy.”<sup>510</sup> Though Popović identifies this contradiction, according to which a new arrangement of the production of art must first pass through the old arrangement, as the chief impediment to a politicized art, he does not offer a suggestion as to how to remove or circumvent it, concluding on the dour note that bureaucracy’s use of misinformation and its attempts to rewrite history have “proved to be a successful method of oppression, of killing new theses and the new artistic alternatives, which are critical toward hitherto existing art practice.”<sup>511</sup> Even alternatives must pass through the state, and this compromises them by bringing their status as alternatives into question.

Tijardović develops this contradiction further in an article for *The Fox* entitled “The ‘Liquidation’ of Art: Self-Management or Self-Protection,” and she makes clear her disillusionment with the direction subsequently taken by the SKC relative to its mission statement. In the essay, she discusses how, since its foundation in 1971, “The Gallery wants to be socially justified, which means it is not neutral. It wants to adapt to society, to the aim of this society — self-management.”<sup>512</sup> However, she accuses the SKC of failing artists in this regard through its adoption of rhetoric demanding “the ‘liquidation’ of art” in response to artists’

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid, p. 849.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, p. 849.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid, p. 849.

<sup>512</sup> Jasna Tijardović, “The ‘Liquidation’ of Art: Self-Management or Self-Protection” in *The Fox* 3 (1976): p. 98.

demands for funding, resources, and access to the institution.<sup>513</sup> Tijardović accuses the SKC of hypocrisy because, as an underfunded institution, it has to demand recognition and funding from the state in order to participate in Yugoslavian society, but then, when faced with the same demands from those who help make up its programming and support it in a variety of other ways, it refuses to bestow on them the very things it asks for itself, namely the capacity to manage and fund itself. She is, like Popović, decidedly less optimistic about the realities of self-management than Blažević. Referring to the principle of self-management, Tijardović concludes, “We have been asked to work independently and to teach others to do so, but in the end it turned out that the institution ... is only paying lip service to its initial organization, that is, the notion of cooperation.”<sup>514</sup>

The similarities between Popović and Tijardović’s ideas and Art & Language’s own, including their drive to collectivity and collaboration, their mutual rejection of the conventional art object in favor of conceptual art, and their desire to politicize art practice by assuming control over the production and distribution processes, would have attracted the two parties to one another. Popović contends that, as people who “dropped in from a Communist system,” his and Tijardović’s relationship with Art & Language was, “of direct use to them, for the self-evaluation of their own thinking and knowledge of the social and political role of art.”<sup>515</sup> Art & Language attempted to return the favor with an October 1975 visit to Belgrade during which Breakstone, Corris, and Menard conducted a series of seminars on the subject of cultural imperialism, familiar from Art & Language’s earlier work on the same topic relative to Australia (see Chapter

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>515</sup> Zoran Popović quoted in Kristine Stiles, “Language and Concepts” in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 809.

3). Given their estrangement from the English participants in Art & Language, Yugoslavia provided Breakstone, Corris, and Menard with the promise of a different kind of international alliance founded on more closely shared political goals.

The poster announcing the Belgrade seminars features a partial silhouette of the United States on the left and a large red star representing Yugoslavia on the right connected diagonally by Art & Language's name, as if the group was bridging the distance between the two places. Atop the silhouette is a text about the seminars in English, while the same text appears on the opposite side in Serbian Cyrillic. The poster announces four seminars at the SKC on the evenings of October 13-16 and a final seminar on the afternoon of October 17 at the Museum of Modern Art in Belgrade. The event is described as "an occasion for mutual learning," "a (possible) model for an 'international' exhibition(?)," and an attempt to "undermine" cultural imperialism. Specifically, Corris and Menard, who authored the poster text, refer to the difficulties of conducting a lecture on this topic:

Indeed, cultural imperialism and the psychology of capitalism have been discussed by many artists and critics. But in most cases (at least in the West), artists/critics think of imperialism and capitalism as little more than topics for a lecture; that is, they rarely treat the lecture itself as problematic, as an activity which, in many ways, recreates all the problems of imperialism — particularly if it is a New York artist/critic talking to a non-New York audience. As long as someone simply uses imperialism as another topic, he/she might just as well be talking about color, edge, dematerialization [...]

To prevent the lecture from reproducing the very logic of cultural imperialism that its content would seek to subvert, Corris and Menard propose a format for the discussions similar to Smith's

Art & Language discussions in Australia earlier that year that would involve Art & Language discussing excerpts or “blurts” from Art & Language texts with the dual aim of replicating the collaborative discussion-based conditions under which Art & Language produce their work as well as subjecting the products of that work to the test of their applicability in a Yugoslavian context.

Transcripts of Art & Language’s seminars exist, but they are fragmentary. Prepared by Art & Language, they include an incomplete record of the discussions of October 15 and 16, and, from what remains, it seems that class and gender in both Yugoslavia and the United States were the primary topics discussed. On the state of the transcripts, Art & Language explain,

These “transcripts” are, at best, culled from the actual conversations. They have been fairly substantially rewritten, on the basis of our audio tapes, for several reasons. The most glaring one is that in many cases the translation was more a sieve than anything else, and we’ve had to fill in the holes as best we could, based on our memory of the person and/or the bit of conversation.<sup>516</sup>

These seminars are the first and only time Art & Language relied on translators for a discussion of this type, and this provided a unique opportunity for language use to reveal cultural baggage and generate miscommunications and noise that result in useful anomalies.

The October 15 discussion largely concerns workers and their relationship to art. Blažević suggests, “art will cease to exist when classes cease to exist. ... In other words, art is creative, as a sphere of work it is characterized by creativity. Workers, for example, are not

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<sup>516</sup> Art & Language, “Conversations at the Student Cultural Center,” p. 1. Michael Corris Papers, Getty Research Institute, Box 6, Folder 7. The Yugoslavian newspaper *Student* 23 (November 4, 1975) is dedicated largely to the seminars and contains alternate, though no more complete, transcript of them in Serbian.

creative in their work. They reproduce, they don't create."<sup>517</sup> Menard asks Blažević what she means when she speaks of bringing the workers closer to art, and she responds that workers need "creativity in their daily work" and proposes that this can be achieved "mainly through self-management."<sup>518</sup> G. Djordjević proposes a different tack. He notes that there are few opportunities for workers to elevate their position in society, and he proposes that workers should labor only "four hours a day" on basic "reproductive activities."<sup>519</sup> If this were so, he adds,

the ration between workers and non-workers would change. Now the number of non-workers is higher and the number of workers is smaller. This would not only lead to the solution of existential problems of those who are not workers — by being workers in production they would secure their existence, they would earn their right. On the other hand, significant potential would be liberated — people, now workers, would have much more free time and consequently they would have the opportunity to get a better education and consequently they would have an active attitude toward culture.<sup>520</sup>

Later in the seminar, Breakstone, whose name is absent from the event poster and who traveled to Belgrade not as a participant in Art & Language but as Corris' partner, broaches the topic of gender roles in the New York art world. She provides a picture analogous to Djordjević's account of class relations relative to Yugoslavian art. In Yugoslavia at the time, the state required that women occupy an equal number of positions as men in cultural institutions

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<sup>517</sup> Art & Language, "Conversations at the Student Cultural Center," p. 5.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid, p. 5.



such as the SKC, and the discrepancy in gender equality between Belgrade and New York, where men occupied a monopoly on positions of power, is a frequent topic of conversation during the seminar. Fielding questions from Tijardović and Rasa Todosijević about relations between the sexes in the New York art world, Breakstone discusses the constant subordination of women, who she notes are burdened with a lack of access to structures of power, an inability to effectively challenge their social position, and multiple roles as artist, wife, mother, and so on. Speaking generally, she remarks,

There are a lot of contradictions involved because you have been brought up in the circumstances that predetermine that you will become a couple and live with another person in a specific fashion. These ideas are hard to get rid of. It means developing an accommodating lifestyle and in turn, changing the given structure of relationships and the relations of couples.<sup>521</sup>

This is one of the few openly feminist statements issuing from a participant in Art & Language on record. Curiously, given the group's general hesitancy embracing the feminist movement, Breakstone's comments recall the outlines of Art & Language's attempts to develop an alternative form of sociality within the art world, which suggests that strong affinities exist between the two despite few contacts between them. She interrogates habitual behaviors and acknowledges the force of ingrained social forms but nevertheless supplies another formula that redeploys ingrained ideas about socializing in directions that are not aggressively oppositional yet remain transformative and are therefore more likely to be found both agreeable and practicable — an approach that, despite Art & Language's reluctance to engage with feminism,

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

resembles theirs in every way. Moreover, the specific course of action Breakstone describes is of a social character that recalls the group structure of Art & Language:

We [women] are forming study groups, political study groups, groups of artists to talk about specific issues with one another and/or establish an agenda for further conversation. In this context we can examine our history, psychology, morphology; as well as our relationships as artists to the market, the media and its influence, the question of class, the capitalist society we live in and its means of oppression, etc. So women have been working together in order to do a different kind of work [...]<sup>522</sup>

The following day, Menard opens the discussion by describing the situation of the working class in the United States and their relationship to art, noting that in America all classes are educated to revere high art, which is “merely one institution among many, all of which are dedicated to the proposition that everyone can at least be middle-class.”<sup>523</sup> He characterizes “the American Way of Life” as consumerist and conformist, against which he proposes Art & Language’s interest in what he calls “‘decentralization’,” which he defines as “an attempt to take control of our own media as a means of production.”<sup>524</sup> In so doing, he suggests that people

actually get involved in what we do, rather than receiving it passively; this is what we mean when we say that the group doesn’t exist to be filled, like a vacuum, but is constituted by those who participate in it... We stress that the only way to have a dialectical relationship to your own culture, rather than a reified relationship

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

where both you and your culture are objects, is to be in a position to produce that culture to begin with, based on your own needs.<sup>525</sup>

Menard contends that such a prospect is unlikely to occur in the United States because “people are not prepared for the self-management of culture” there.<sup>526</sup> Corris elaborates, proposing that artists in New York “consider themselves above classes” as individuals exempt from class conflict.<sup>527</sup> He laments the inability of artists “to constitute their sociality as a group, rather than as a collection of isolated individuals.”<sup>528</sup> The picture Popović subsequently offers of the artists at the SKC suggests that even the collective action Corris desires does not necessarily improve the social position of artists in the art world or society generally:

The Center was founded in '71, but unfortunately, it never worked out beforehand its sources of finance. So bureaucracy doesn't know who's responsible for financing us, and because it isn't black and white, bureaucracy is trying to avoid its obligations to finance us. Since our activity is in resistance to the existing art, which is a restrictive art in our country, the art bureaucracy wants us to have no power. So I hope you see why the Center is so isolated.<sup>529</sup>

Popović concludes his remarks by stating his hope that contact between the SKC and Art & Language would “undermine both imperialism and isolation.”<sup>530</sup>

After the seminars but while still in Belgrade, Corris and Menard wrote about their “gut reaction” to the situation of art and artists in Yugoslavia.<sup>531</sup> Characterizing their impressions as

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid p. 8.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid p. 9.

“mixed,” they lament that “it’s a bit sad seeing all the frustration here, at least among the people close to us, the people who invited us here and those we’ve spoken with most since we’ve been here.”<sup>532</sup> They had visited Belgrade to combat cultural imperialism, but judging from this text, Corris and Menard came to see that the indigenous contradictions of self-management socialism, such as the isolation Popović described, hampered their Yugoslavian interlocutors as much as if not more than cultural imperialism and that, moreover, the SKC was not the promising alternative to the situation facing artists in capitalist New York that they may have hoped to find in Belgrade. Of the SKC, they write:

In fact, the Center has become a kind of prisonhouse of dissent, that is, it has become an institutionally (financially) sanctioned means for students, and particularly artists (most of whom are no longer students), to register some kind of dissent, but a means which virtually excludes all other means. [...] The need to work through institutions, the virtual impossibility of independent organization and action, is as overbearing here as it is in the U.S., though for different reasons.<sup>533</sup>

Corris and Menard suggest that the paradox of working both within and against bureaucracy generates a specifically Yugoslavian version of the impasse limiting cultural politics:

With the Center, then, they now have a place to show their work fairly regularly; and they have a generally receptive audience as well, even if not too many “workers” show up. Not that their work can change very much, of course. Which

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<sup>531</sup> Michael Corris and Andrew Menard, correspondence, p. 3. Michael Corris Papers, Getty Research Institute, Box 6, Folder 190.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

is the overwhelming impression we've been left with: something is better than nothing, yes, how true, but it's all so frustrating, the same ground covered time and again, the same discussions, the same exhibitions, "art and revolution" "art and revolution."<sup>534</sup>

In the end, Corris and Menard remain hopeful that "future cooperation between New York and Belgrade" might result from the seminars, but, apart from Popović's film, nothing did.<sup>535</sup>

What does result from the seminars, though, is a series of photo/text panels that (Provisional) Art & Language exhibited in their at John Weber Gallery as *The Organization of Culture Under Self-Management Socialism*. Each of the panels contains three elements on its square surface that each occupy horizontal registers from top to bottom: a question written by Art & Language after returning from Belgrade, an image, generally of the discussions, taking up the bulk of the panel, and, at the bottom, an excerpt from the seminar transcripts that can be interpreted as an address if not an answer to the question at the top of that panel. Many excerpts concern Art & Language's proposed theme of cultural imperialism and are drawn from the first two days of the SKC seminars, which provides a glimpse into those proceedings. A representative panel features the question "HOW MANY YUGOSLAVIAN ARTISTS CAN YOU NAME (NO CHEATING)?," a photograph of Corris and Menard listening to someone not pictured speaking, and a quote from Corris that describes the way international art exhibitions can function as a form of cultural imperialism when "embedded in a foreign cultural context."

Complementing these panels is a version of *The Organization of Culture Under Monopoly Capitalism*, a work created by Corris, Heller, and Menard that examines the Arts and

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

Artifacts Indemnity Act, which the United States Congress enacted December 20, 1975 “To provide indemnities for exhibitions of artistic and humanistic endeavors, and for other purposes.”<sup>536</sup> Previously, parts of this project had been shown from April-May 1976 at Galerie Eric Fabre in Paris during a (Provisional) Art & Language exhibition there, and, along with the Yugoslavia material, during March 1976 at the Student Union Gallery at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst at the invitation of Jerry Kearns, who also organized a series of seminars conducted by Breakstone, Corris, Heller, and Menard both at UMASS and at nearby Smith College. When shown in galleries, the work consists of some combination of photo/text panels, a video, and a typescript of the video. A printed version of this material appears in *The Fox*.<sup>537</sup>

*The Organization of Culture Under Monopoly Capitalism* anticipates the protracted debates about government funding for the arts that began in the 1980s, but in its more immediate context, its chief relevance lies in its creators’ fear that alliances between institutions, specifically the state and the museum, would advance American interests abroad. To prepare the work, Corris, Heller, and Menard conducted and videotaped interviews with Jack Duncan, Counsel to the House Select Subcommittee on Education and Robert Wade, General Counsel to the National Endowment for the Arts, who both played roles in drafting the legislation, as well as museum-goers at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose comments in the video signify public unawareness of the act. Footage of these interviews, plus additional footage of Corris, Heller,

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<sup>536</sup> U. S. Congress, Senate, *The Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act*, S. 1800, 94<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (December 20, 1975).

<sup>537</sup> Michael Corris, Preston Heller, and Andrew Menard, “The Organization of Culture Under Monopoly Capitalism, Part I: ‘How Do You Feel About the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act?’” and “The Organization of Culture Under Monopoly Capitalism, Part II: Culture Ain’t No Headless Horseman,” *The Fox* 3 (1976): pp. 128-154.

and Menard talking to one another and commenting on other parts of the video, forms the basis for the video component of the work. As edited together, the final video jumps back and forth between these four sources and builds from a general explanation of the act and the process of its enacting to more pointed questions about how the act serves American interests, especially Cold War interests that pertain to relations between the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union and China. Heller cites a 1974 ad hoc bill indemnifying the Metropolitan Museum of Art against losses or damages resulting from loans to the Soviet Union for an exhibition of American art as a precedent for the act to show how embedded the legislation is in the international policy of *détente*. Wade agrees with Heller, and Duncan too suggests that such interests motivated the act, stating, “*détente* probably provided the mechanism by which this legislation finally evolved.”<sup>538</sup>

The video is primarily concerned with unpacking what a “national interest” is in the context of the act, and Heller puts this question to Duncan, who answers,

For instance, bringing over the Chinese art, helping the American people to understand and see a sense of history of what those countries have done and vice versa. It would be in the national interest, perhaps, for Russians to see or Chinese to see some of our works of art, so that their people and their leaders could understand...rather than just depend on the written word. They could see what the culture is made out of, from its works of art.<sup>539</sup>

Later in the video, audio inserts feature Wade discussing his reluctance to allow State Department oversight of indemnification requests, and Wade states, “I can see down the road the

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

State Department denying exhibitions because they don't for some reason like it.”<sup>540</sup> Menard wagers that Wade's concerns are unfounded, and he says, in conversation with Corris and Heller, “I'll bet you that most of the shows that go out — given the connections between museums and foreign policy anyway — that there is not going to be any problem with the State Department.”<sup>541</sup> Menard proposes that the act strengthens relations between the government and “people [...] in the very high echelons of decision-making in the art world,” including many who testified in support of the bill, which Heller notes was the recipient of “virtually unanimous agreement” during hearings on it.<sup>542</sup>

When asked whom the act stands to benefit, Duncan cites “the American people” and Wade suggests “the people of the United States.”<sup>543</sup> Commenting on this in the follow-up discussion, Heller proposes that, in actuality, the act maintains “the same old relationship to the culture [...]; people are still going to be in a consumer relationship.”<sup>544</sup> Corris laments, “As far as these bureaucrats are concerned, the museums are the best places to administer culture.”<sup>545</sup> Menard links these two sentiments by claiming that

concentrating money in the hands of museums [...] means that museums take on a much greater role as cultural institutions; and if they are seen as educational institutions — and they are seen as the salvation of education, in a way — then it means that the salvation of education is once again consumerism.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid, p. 141.



Following interview segments in which both Duncan and Wade claim museums to be educational institutions, Art & Language discuss the prospects of challenging an alliance between cultural institutions and the state:

A. Menard     It would seem that one of the things we are trying to do is take some control over our culture [...] We don't want to be voyeurs.

P. Heller     Exactly, and that's where, if you take an action like the Whitney [protest by Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, January 3, 1976] where, I think, we have to view that action in relation to more comprehensive actions — for example, getting information about this kind of legislation and the Museum Services Act — really beginning to understand what our relationship is to that. Because when we talk about the organization of culture at the highest level, that's really where it takes place.

M. Corris     Are you saying that it is enough to provide this information alone?

P. Heller     Oh I don't think it's enough...<sup>547</sup>

As a solution to the problem of how to organize more egalitarian access to the means of producing culture, Art & Language discuss the possibility of opening a storefront in SoHo that would serve as “a resource center” for the community.<sup>548</sup> Though such a project never came to fruition, it would have functioned similarly to the self-managed SKC in Belgrade while, at the

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid, pp. 142-143.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

same time, by occupying the space of a commercial storefront, been adequate to how Art & Language “are embedded in Capitalist society as artists.”<sup>549</sup>

In an article for *Studio International* entitled “Now About This Storefront,” Breakstone, Corris, Heller, and Menard propose “an integrated network of storefront spaces, a broad, horizontal organization aimed at community self-management, complemented by connections to other Socialist groups.”<sup>550</sup> This would serve to decentralize major institutional spaces and their monopolies on the production and distribution of culture. For Art & Language’s contribution to this effort, the authors of this statement consider a storefront “located in New York, in SoHo, and directed mainly at the local art community.”<sup>551</sup> As both an architectural edifice and an information center, the storefront would be capable of functioning “as a media alternative to museums” and as “facilities for *doing* [work] — in the context of community activism.”<sup>552</sup> As a decentered space, it would provide a measure of autonomy and independency from the art world.

Questions about the future direction of the collective came to a head as (Provisional) Art & Language mounted their June 1976 exhibition at John Weber Gallery. To discuss their situation, they convened in the basement residence of Karl Beveridge and Carole Condé at 49 East First Street in the East Village for a week of meetings. In retrospect, Corris writes, “It became clear to most of us by the end of the week that the true purpose of these meetings was to force the issue of the ‘semi-autonomy’ of the sub-groups” within Art & Language.<sup>553</sup> “The group

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

<sup>550</sup> Jill Breakstone, Michael Corris, Preston Heller, and Andrew Menard, “Now About This Storefront,” *Studio International* 191, no. 980 (March-April 1976): pp. 108-109.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>553</sup> Michael Corris, “Inside a New York Art Gang: Selected Documents of Art & Language, New York” in Ann Stephen, ed. *Artists Think: The Late Works of Ian Burn* (Sydney and Melbourne: Power Publications in association with Monash University Gallery, 1996), p. 68.

was virtually evenly split,” Corris adds, “between those who wished to continue to work in and around the art world and its institutions and those who were willing to jettison such a commitment once and for all.”<sup>554</sup> Ramsden and Thompson led the former contingent, while Corris, Heller, and Menard advocated for the latter position, and the two groups were unable to reach a compromise either on which direction to take or on whether to permit multiple autonomous groups to operate under the name Art & Language, which would have violated the provisions’ strict enforcement of collective agreement on all work made public under the Art & Language name, something Ramsden and Thompson, chief authors and supporters of the provisions, were unwilling to concede.

The adherents to the provisions managed one further action together before the New York section of Art & Language unraveled irreparably. In August 1976, (Provisional) Art & Language participated in the Venice Biennale with a banner that read “Welcome to Venice / The Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie ‘Eternalizes’ Local Color / Ars Longa, Vita Brevis Est,” another assertion of their awareness of the potentially damaging effects of international cultural contact undertaken in the interests of the ruling class. Kosuth and Charlesworth also participated in the biennale, and a review in *The New York Times* by Flora Lewis captures the contested state of the Art & Language’s relations with Kosuth, the breakdown of which occurred between their acceptance of a showing in Venice and his departure from Art & Language:

Two competing, antagonistic American groups were also permitted to enter contributions.

One, whose leader calls himself Joseph Kossuth [sic], brought a batch of huge posters headlined “Where Do You Stand?” Pointing out the importance of

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

knowing one's "social location," it offers a series of multiple-choice prepackaged reactions to the whole Biennale. [...]

The other American group, called "The Fox," protested bitterly against such a leaven of humor. But Mr. di Meana managed to assuage them by allowing them to put up a huge red banner outside the old shipyard at Giudecca, where the "international contemporary" exhibition has been organized, and where graphics are to be shown next month.<sup>555</sup>

Lewis also quotes Carlo Ripa di Meana, president of the Venice Biennale, who describes an unproductive meeting between Art & Language and Italian workers, then very seriously committed to a Marxist-Leninist position:

Mr. di Meana said "The Fox" group arranged some open meetings with Italian workers, students and other to explain the depth of their commitment, as artists, to social concerns.

"They were completely sincere," he said, "but to such highly politicized people as Italians you can't be candid in that way. The Italians just didn't trust them, they were so naïve."<sup>556</sup>

For their part, Art & Language argued, "The social practice of the Italian intelligentsia reflects the ideological theories and practices of the Left-leadership and not the direct class conscious history of the rank and file."<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> Flora Lewis, "Venice Biennale's Revival Offers Vitality," *The New York Times* (August 25, 1976): p. 22.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>557</sup> Art & Language, "Doge City," *Art-Language* 3, vol. 4 (October 1976): p. 49.

Art & Language's participation in the Venice Biennale was announced prior to the June meetings, and it did little if anything to reconcile the fractured group. Of tensions within the collective, Menard wrote that Art & Language "never resolved the principle contradiction [...] between our material base in the glittering bourgeois world of Culture and Highbrow Conversation and our historical projectivity towards (the advanced sectors of) the working class."<sup>558</sup> Characterizing the provisions as "inadequate" and "still-born," he suggested, "It's time to get rid of them."<sup>559</sup> Acting on this proposal, Menard, together with Breakstone, Corris, and Heller, who were deepening their relations with Trotskyite, Maoist, and Black Nationalist collectives, including the Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union, the Congress of Afrikan People, and the Revolutionary Communist League, issued a public statement in September 1976 to Artists Meeting for Cultural Change in (Provisional) Art & Language's name, and this use of the collective's name without collective consent drew Ramsden's ire. As Corris describes it, "A confrontation at Ramsden's loft over above-mentioned communiqué" ensued that "resulted in the aforementioned sub-group's disenfranchisement, as Ramsden asserted what he took to be his 'historical' prerogative to the 'name' Art & Language."<sup>560</sup> In actuality, the provisions were having their intended effect: severing the link between Art & Language's two main sections, with Ramsden, intent on returning to England, preparing to join Baldwin in restarting Art & Language.

Ramsden's anger with Corris in turn inflamed Burn's, and Corris claims that Burn "responded incredulously to what he considered to be an absurdly transparent pretext to void the group of its supposedly 'destabilising' elements," leading Burn to side with Corris, Heller, and

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<sup>558</sup> Andrew Menard, unpublished text, quoted in Corris, "Inside a New York Art Gang," p. 69.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid, pp. 69-70.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

Menard.<sup>561</sup> Burn, who had been absent for the June meetings while teaching at the University of California, San Diego, had come to hold views irreconcilable with his long-time collaborator Ramsden. In a June 1976 interview with Michael Auping conducted in Long Beach, California during this teaching stint, and coinciding roughly with the June meetings in New York, Burn responded to a question about what the function of art should be by expressing deep concerns about its capacity to function as an instrument of social change and proposing the need for more direct political activity:

There is no way we can blueprint the future! What we can talk about is the function that art serves in the present society. We can talk about how one might go about transforming the present society. However, the ways of transforming it or changing it are *not* through art. Art plays a very minor role in relation to that kind of change.<sup>562</sup>

Following Kosuth's earlier exit, the break between Burn and Ramsden severed the last remaining tie between the earliest New York-based participants in Art & Language, and this ensured that Art & Language had little future remaining there. By early 1977, first Ramsden and later Kozlov and Thompson relocated to England to continue participating in Art & Language with Baldwin and Harrison. Breakstone, Corris, Heller, and Menard founded the journal *Red-Herring* in New York, and they edited it until 1978. Burn, involved in the first issue of *Red-Herring*, returned to Australia in 1977 to form, with Smith, Lendon, and others, first Media Action Group and then Union Media Services, which were active in Australian union movements of the 1970s and

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>562</sup> Ian Burn, quoted in Michael Auping, "A Fox" (1976) in *30 Years: Interviews and Outtakes* (Fort Worth and Munich: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and Prestel, 2007), pp. 70-71. Emphasis in original.

1980s.<sup>563</sup> Beveridge and Condé, also involved in the early stages of *Red-Herring*, allied their artistic practice to Canadian union movement in Toronto.<sup>564</sup> Bigelow remained in New York to distribute *Art-Language* and *The Fox*, but Art & Language's existence as a transnational collective had ended, and the group's name came to designate the work of Baldwin and Ramsden, including projects undertaken with either Harrison or Thompson.

As (Provisional) Art & Language fragmented, Popović, having returned to Belgrade, assembled his film *Borba u Njujorku*, which he initially intended to be a documentary on radical art practice in New York but which inadvertently functions as a portrait of Art & Language's final months there and captures the impasses of politicized art practice in New York at the time. The struggle to which the film's title refers was so intense that, according to Kristine Stiles, who cites a letter Popović wrote to her,

because of the “militant radicalism of [those associated with] the Art & Language group,” artists such as Hans Haacke, Vito Acconci, Dennis Oppenheim, Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd, Bernar Venet, Carolee Schneemann, and Robert Mapplethorpe “refused to take part.”<sup>565</sup>

In its finished form, with a runtime of just under an hour, *Borba u Njujorku* is less a straightforward documentary than a collection of stylistically and thematically diverse short films. By the time Popović assembled his final cut, only Bigelow, Chamberlain, Kozlov, the Ramsdens, and Thompson were participating in Art & Language projects in New York. Many of

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<sup>563</sup> On Media Action Group and Union Media Services, see Sandy Kirby, ed. *Ian Burn, Art: Critical, Political* (Sydney: University of Western Sydney, 1996) and Sandy Kirby, *Artists and Unions: A Critical Tradition: A Report on the Art & Working Life Program* (Redfern: Australia Council, 1992).

<sup>564</sup> On Beveridge and Condé's work, see Bruce Barber, ed. *Condé and Beveridge: Class Works* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2008).

<sup>565</sup> Stiles, “Language and Concepts,” p. 809.

the group's former participants are included either individually or as members of other groups and collectives, and the film also includes contributions from people in Popović's extended social circle.

Following an opening credits sequence that combines shots of Manhattan taken from the air with an instrumental funk soundtrack, as if the viewer is entering the city, the film is divided into eleven segments provided by the subjects of the film, and it concludes with a lengthy shot taken from the Staten Island ferry that shows Popović watching Manhattan become gradually smaller, a metaphor for his departure for Belgrade, where he assembled the film. *Borba u Njujorku* was shot entirely in black and white, and sound and music are overdubbed throughout most of the film, though some segments use simultaneous sound. Most feature rudimentary or stationary camera work, and cinematic aesthetics are generally kept to a minimum. The film consists of eleven segments: "International Local" by International Local (Kosuth, Anthony McCall, and Sarah Charlesworth), "Whitney Boycott" by Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, "Collective Voice" by Collective Voice (Terry Berkowitz, Corinne Bronfman, and Ruth Rachlin), "Back and Forth" by Beveridge and Condé, "3 Big Reasons" by Adrienne Hamalian and Howard Schamest, "The Bronx" by Klaus Mettig and Katharina Sieverding, "A New Disguise for the Bourgeoisie" by Michael Krugman and Saul Ostrow, "Comment" by Ian Burn, "The Arts are a Growth Industry, Alright. If You're Fond of Cancer" by Red Herring (Breakstone, Corris, Heller, and Menard), "Art & Language Edition" attributed to *The Fox*, and "...and now for something completely different..." by Art & Language (Bigelow, Chamberlain, Kozlov, The Ramsdens, and Mayo Thompson). Art & Language participants both past and present feature in eight of these segments.



The International Local segment provides insights into the process by which Popović produced the film.<sup>566</sup> It consists of seven title cards that display English text in white over a black background as a voice reads them in Serbian. It opens,

New York, November 1976. The proposed topic of this film is “Art and Society”.

This film is itself a social product. The social relations of its production and those of its consumption are the human contexts in which this film, as a product, assumes social meaning. As a vehicle which carries content it is itself the subject of which it speaks.<sup>567</sup>

The text goes on to explain that each of the segments are “individuated products” and that there was “no dialogue” between the various producers, “although at other times and in other contexts we have worked socially and cooperatively with many of these individuals,” a testament to the fragmentation of Art & Language, a theme to which the remaining participants in Art & Language return in the film’s final segment.<sup>568</sup> That the segments are “individuated products” also reveals the degree to which Popović withdraws authorship of the film, preferring to present his colleagues in Belgrade with New York as seen by artists living and working there. International Local’s segment continues with statements about the meaning of the film and art in general:

Is this film art? Is it political? Do the answers to these questions depend on the nature of our work? Of Zoran’s work? Of the distribution context? Of how you

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<sup>566</sup> On International Local, see Anina Nosei Weber, ed. *Discussion* (New York, Norristown, Milan: Out of London Press, 1980), an exhibition catalogue published on the occasion of the 1977 exhibition “Discussions” held at New York University. At the time of this exhibition and publication, Nosei was married to John Weber, Art & Language’s former gallerist and dealer in New York.

<sup>567</sup> Popović, *Borba u New Yorku*, p. 17.

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

perceive it? We say yes, and because we say yes, we cannot determine the exact “art-nature” or “political-nature” of the film’s meaning.<sup>569</sup>

It concludes by linking art to social life: “People make art. Art mediates the relationship between people.”<sup>570</sup>

Within the remaining segments, a diverse array of political concerns unfolds. AMCC protest against “American Art: An Exhibition from the Collection of Mr. & Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup>” at the Whitney Museum of American Art with on screen appearances by Heller and Menard, who distribute leaflets on the sidewalk outside the Whitney as an overdubbed voice reads its text aloud, claiming that the Whitney and the Rockefeller collection it presents represent “the private interests and values of the ruling class.”<sup>571</sup> Krugman and Ostrow, who appear in the AMCC segment, also perform an institutional critique in their own segment on P.S.1 (now MoMA PS1), then newly founded in an old public school in the Long Island City neighborhood of Queens. In a voiceover accompanying documentary images of the neighborhood’s working class population, they claim that P.S.1 perpetuates control of the arts by the ruling class under the guise of offering artists an alternative to traditional institutional spaces. They suggest that it is “an institution of, by and for the bourgeoisie.”<sup>572</sup> Neither exercise in institutional critique rises above the accusatory level of protest. Whether or not their accusers are correct that the institutions they assail are in league with the ruling class or the bourgeoisie, they offer no productive alternative, and this is a theme repeated elsewhere in *Struggle in New York*, as many problems are identified but the art world seems to offer no space for alternatives.

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

Feminist concerns arise in Collective Voice's discussion of the role of women and artists in society. The group sits in a kitchen and reads from a prepared script: "We're trying to find a progressive function for ourselves in society, as women and as artists," Rachlin, who also appears in the AMCC scene, says of their aims. However, like the AMCC and Krugman and Ostrow, Collective Voice has difficulty articulating a positive vision of such a function.<sup>573</sup> Beveridge and Condé offer a more productive reading of gender roles in their segment. Juxtaposing images of Condé performing domestic chores and labor with images of Beveridge reading and relaxing, Condé discusses the difficulty of playing the role of both a mother and a professional artist, while Beveridge discusses how "our respective roles have become institutions."<sup>574</sup> But unlike the AMCC, Krugman, and Ostrow, Beveridge and Condé take a more nuanced approach to institutions: "Any alternative must be built through us. To attack the institutions is to attack ourselves!" Beveridge says.<sup>575</sup> As the segment continues, the images shift to depict Beveridge and Condé working on political posters and writing, and their spoken text also changes to consider the role of art, which Beveridge proposes, echoing others in the film, "is basically a function of the class in power."<sup>576</sup> Condé suggests, "Art must become responsible for its politics!" although, again, a precise directive is found wanting. Near the end of the segment, Beveridge proposes that art activity can "revolutionize the art world" but "not the real world," and he claims "Social revolution becomes cultural avant-garding" before the segment concludes with a quote from Lenin about non-proletarians being unable to break with all bourgeois

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

conventions, which suggests, yet again, hopelessness in the face of a hopelessly bourgeois art world.<sup>577</sup>

Urban poverty is the subject of Mettig and Sieverding's segment, which, like Beveridge and Condé's, tactically deploys imagistic juxtapositions, in this instance to compare the recently finished World Trade Center as a center of financial capital to a street in The Bronx ravaged by urban poverty, its other side. They reinforce the comparison by juxtaposing up-tempo and down tempo funk music over the images to play up the difference between the rejuvenation of downtown Manhattan and the persistent devastation of The Bronx. Class difference is also the subject of Hamalian and Schamest's segment, which sarcastically offers, as its title suggests, "3 Big Reasons" to adopt bourgeois ideology, but their muddled jokes corny execution fall flat. The segment ends with a clichéd image of a hand labeled "ART" washing a hand labeled "CAPITALISM" to invoke the Leninist slogan "one hand washes the other." Yet again, no alternatives emerge.

Burn, seated at a desk in a home office, speaks briefly and directly into a static camera about cultural dependency in Australia, linking it to Australian politics during the Cold War, in particular the dismissal of the Gough Whitlam Labour government in 1975, which he characterizes as "a right wing coup" and attributes partially to "U.S. agents" who disliked Whitlam's opposition to American military bases on Australian soil at a time when the Soviet Union's foreign interests expanded into the Indian Ocean.<sup>578</sup> Government is also a concern of Red Herring's segment on a National Committee for Cultural Resources report, which concluded

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid, p 28.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

that the arts are “a growth industry.”<sup>579</sup> Over title cards that depict a chalkboard on which are placed two images of the United States Capitol Building surrounded with text, Corris plays a cheap electric piano while a male voice reads aloud the text written on the board, closing by stating, “Art is trying to mediate the contradiction between the means of production and the relations of production by confining our consciousness, our aspirations to the limits of its production for profit. It can only fail.”<sup>580</sup> Here, in lieu of an alternative, Red Herring identify a completely bleak situation, but one that, for reasons that remain undisclosed, is on the verge of collapse.

Two segments by Art & Language remain. The first, presented under the title “Art & Language Edition” recaps themes addressed in the by then defunct magazine *The Fox*, most of which concern cultural politics in a more skeptical manner than the assured rhetoric of many of the other contributors to *Borba u Njujorku*. Over images of the covers and contents of the magazine’s three issues, a female voice reads aloud the text from the poster that announced the first issue of the magazine, which includes a lengthy list of topics and questions the magazine subsequently addressed. In this instance, beyond the life of the magazine, the rereading of the list suggests that these issues — everything from modernism and the art market to the critique of institutions and the failures of conceptual art — remain relevant topics for discussion because they persist in their irresolution.

This penultimate segment concludes with an image of the cover of the third and final issue of *The Fox*. A cut to the cover of the October 1976 issue of *Art-Language*, which prominently features a “FOX 4” logo on its cover, serves as a reminder that *The Fox* has ceased

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

publication and that *Art-Language*, based in England, has usurped its role. So begins the (Provisional) Art & Language segment created by the few participants in the group remaining in New York. Titled “...and now for something completely different...,” Art & Language’s segment is unlike the rest of the film, and the title, borrowed from a phrase popularized by the comedy troupe Monty Python, suggests Art & Language’s desire to put both literal and figurative distance between themselves and the rest of the film. Their segment replaces the potentially alienating rhetoric of ardent protest manifest throughout the film with the levity of comedy that mocks the sorry state of cultural politics.

The segment is a musical performance that reprises the general format of *Nine Gross and Conspicuous Errors*. It includes four lightly rehearsed songs that draw heavily from socialist workers’ songs, though the performances deny the mass appeal of this populist genre with ironic detachment and self-awareness, and the songs playfully reinvigorate musical and lyrical clichés by deploying them in surprising juxtapositions. The songs shift freely from attacks on one or more persons or tendencies to collections of nuanced inside jokes about Art & Language’s history to sarcastic rebukes of hackneyed artistic and political conventions. Thompson plays either Vox organ or electric guitar throughout and Chamberlain plays drums while Bigelow, Kozlov, the Ramsdens, and Thompson, by then the only remaining New York-based participants in Art & Language, serve as vocalists, variously singing, speaking, sloganeering, and reading aloud in vocal tones and inflections ranging from plain voice to mock fervor. The band performs in a loft surrounded by copies of the October 1976 issue of *Art-Language* and posters of its cover, insisting simultaneously on their break from *The Fox* and their effort to continue its critical examination of the art world.

The first of the songs, “A Lot of Sad Feelings...Fan Mail,” features Kozlov and Paula Ramsden singing interspersed with Thompson reading excerpts from “fan mail” addressed to Mel Ramsden by an unnamed German collector of Art & Language works concerned about the distressed state of the group. Kozlov and Paula Ramsden’s singing of socialist workers’ lyrics are joined to the letter when Thompson reads the latter’s conclusion, in which the collector states that he is “not in the position to help you out of my personal pocket,” thus linking workers’ concerns to Art & Language’s own working conditions and material needs. At the end of the song, following an interlude in which Ramsden proudly announces that “peasants” have burned down “the cathedral,” Bigelow takes the microphone to read from the October 1976 *Art-Language*, declaring in a calmer tone of voice, “Let’s not pretend: most of the power and clout in the art world is in the hands of Fascists of one kind or another.”<sup>581</sup> This proves to be the final time that Art & Language deliver a verdict on the art world from New York.

The second song, “Harangue,” shares its title with a track from *Corrected Slogans*. Like that song, it is a rant about political topics, the bite of which is simultaneously suspended and reinforced by the joyous delivery of Bigelow and Ramsden, who together grip a single microphone to attack Kosuth:

Mean-ing, mean-ing, mean-ing is not an ontological

Property of legislation, ownership

Slap a court injunction on us

And we will produce

Joey Kosuth get a writ

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid, p. 39. See Art & Language, “Above Us the Waves (A Fascist Index)” in *Art-Language*, vol. 3, no. 4 (October 1976): p. 64. The typography between this article and Popović, *Borba u New Yorku* differs slightly, but it does not affect the sense of the text.

And we will produce

...

Class struggle is for mean-ing

Not bourgeois

Right and wrong

Right and wrong<sup>582</sup>

Kosuth, who had been the primary instigator behind *The Fox*, objected to its usurpation in the October 1976 issue of *Art-Language* and circulated around New York a broadsheet containing an unsigned public notice accusing anyone trading on *The Fox*'s name with opportunism, one of the charges that, when leveled at him, led to his break with the group. In the song, Art & Language counter by accusing Kosuth of legislating the ownership of meaning. They imply that his alleged bourgeois individualism implies legal and moral notions that have no place in class struggle, which properly aims to liberate meaning from strictures of precisely this sort.

The third song and the last — apart from a brief coda featuring the Ramsdens' daughter Anne scat singing over organ and drum accompaniment, which leads into a credits segment — is "Plekhanov," which also appears on *Corrected Slogans*. Kozlov and Thompson perform the song as a duet with Thompson playing organ while Kozlov sings lyrics loosely about Georgi Plekhanov, the founder of Russian Marxism and, as author of the 1912 study *Art and Social Life*, an early Marxist theorist of art.<sup>583</sup> As the song draws to a close, Kozlov sings its refrain one last time: "Who's learned the language of the Internationale?"<sup>584</sup> The International Worker's Association, which, together with the Paris Commune of 1871, provided lyricist Eugène Pottier

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<sup>582</sup> Popović, *Borba u New Yorku*, p. 41.

<sup>583</sup> Georgi Plekhanov, *Art and Social Life* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

<sup>584</sup> Popović, *Borba u New Yorku*, p. 42.



with inspiration to write the most famous anthem of leftist solidarity, was on Art & Language's mind in 1976. In "The International: England 1 (o.g.) USA 1 (o.g.)," published in *Art-Language* in June 1976, they discuss its persistence as a political option.<sup>585</sup> The title of this essay evokes the scoring line of an international soccer match in which the English and American teams have reached a tie after each scoring own goals, an apt metaphor for Art & Language's fraught state as an international collaboration by late 1976. In October of that year, Art & Language refer to themselves as Art & Language<sup>(i)</sup> — having by then abandoned the (Provisional) Art & Language moniker, its purpose having been fulfilled — inside an issue of *Art-Language*. The <sup>(i)</sup> stands for "international" and emphasizes belated solidarity between England and New York, but within months Art & Language would no longer be international. "Who's learned the language of the Internationale?" With these final words, Art & Language's New York group, unable to maintain the transnational sociality that had driven their work over the preceding eight years, come to their final impasse with an uncertain gesture toward these words:

*C'est la lutte finale*

*Groupons-nous, et demain*

*L'Internationale*

*Sera le genre humain.*

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<sup>585</sup> Art & Language, "The International: England 1 (o.g.) USA 1 (o.g.)," *Art-Language*, vol. 3, no. 3 (June 1976): pp. 66-72.

## CONCLUSION — “GOING-ON”

In an essay with the ambiguous title “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” Peter Osborne draws the conclusion that Art & Language mark a fundamental turning point in the history of art. Osborne conceives of conceptual art as a “vanishing mediator” between the modernism that came before it and the contemporary art that followed, and for him Art & Language stand at its apex as the movement’s most extreme practitioners.<sup>586</sup> Implicitly a challenge to those who would claim (and still do claim) that Art & Language’s “pandemonium” — their “trouble directed inward,” as Mel Ramsden and Michael Corris phrased the matter in their introduction to Art & Language’s *Blurting in A&L* in 1973 — is a refinement and thus an extension of modernism’s obsession with autonomy, Osborne argues that Art & Language’s recourse to philosophy, especially philosophical language, broached so radical a challenge to the aesthetic preoccupations of modernism that art aspiring to be taken seriously, regardless of its kind or character, could no longer ignore conceptual art and, in particular, what Art & Language accomplished in their effort to bring art into alignment with philosophy.<sup>587</sup>

Osborne distinguishes two types of conceptual art: an especially exclusive “theoretical or strong Conceptualism” that includes only Art & Language and the early work of Joseph Kosuth

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<sup>586</sup> Peter Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy” in Michael Newman and Jon Bird, eds. *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 64-65. For Osborne on conceptual art generally, see Peter Osborne, *Conceptual Art* (London: Phaidon, 2002).

<sup>587</sup> Mel Ramsden and Michael Corris, “Introduction” in Art & Language, *Blurting in A&L* (New York and Halifax: Art & Language Press and Nova Scotia College of Art, 1973), p. 11.

and a much larger, more loosely defined “weak Conceptualism,” which is weak not in the sense of being inferior to “strong Conceptualism” but in a slackening of criteria for inclusion in it. Osborne defines “strong Conceptualism” so restrictedly in order to highlight its heavy investment in philosophy — specifically, analytic philosophy or the philosophy of language. Kosuth exemplifies a “first degree” of “strong Conceptualism” at a single remove from the “zero degree” of “weak Conceptualism” represented by the work and writings of Sol LeWitt, and Art & Language figure as a “second degree” of philosophically oriented conceptual art that presses conceptual art’s interest in philosophy to its fullest extent. Nevertheless, for Osborne, “strong Conceptualism,” even at its apotheosis in the work of Art & Language, failed to assert conceptuality as the essential locus of art’s meaning and thereby “reasserted the ineradicability of the aesthetic as a necessary element of the artwork, via a failed negation. At the same time, however,” Osborne notes, “it also definitively demonstrated the radical insufficiency of this element to the meaning-producing capacity of the work.”<sup>588</sup> According to Osborne’s account of conceptual art, the meaning of art after Art & Language can no longer be reduced to how art looks or the reasons why it looks the way it does; instead, art’s meaning vacillates between its

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<sup>588</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” p. 65. Art & Language proposed retrospectively — and perhaps retroactively as well — that they “aimed to be amateurs” and never aspired to be taken seriously as anything other than artists. See Art & Language, “We Aimed To Be Amateurs,” *Art-Language* (new series) 2 (June 1997): pp. 40-49, reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), pp. 442-448. For Kosuth, art could never become philosophy because it comes “after philosophy.” See Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy” (1969) in *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. Gabriele Guercio, ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 13-32.

insufficient appeals to both the senses and the intellect, which are not opposed so much as they are both unable to provide an exclusive basis for an account of what art means.<sup>589</sup>

I undertook this study to clarify what exactly vanished in Art & Language's historical act of mediation in order to illuminate this crucial juncture in not just the history of twentieth-century art but also the history of art as such. For Osborne, *Index 01* of 1972 is Art & Language's "summary work" and, as such, "the culmination and the demise of strong Conceptualism."<sup>590</sup> However, as I have shown by focusing on Art & Language's challenges to the art world as both a social institution and a theoretical discourse, Art & Language's recourse to philosophy and its language developed in significant ways well beyond the moment of their fascination with the philosophy of language, which informed the planning and production of *Index 01*. By undertaking investigations of the art world, investigations that were pursued most intently in (or through) New York rather than in England, where indexing remained the collective's dominant practice, Art & Language made extensive recourse to the philosophy of science as practiced by Thomas S. Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, and Paul Feyerabend in order to position themselves against the art world, and investments in the writings and politics of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, and elements of the philosophical tradition of Western Marxism enabled them to politicize this relationship. In other words, Art & Language's entanglements with philosophy did not conclude in 1972 but actually intensified as they developed their understanding of the art world and configured their collectivity as an alternative to its prevailing values and norms for the purpose of pursuing broader societal changes. Part and parcel of conceptual art's challenge to

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<sup>589</sup> On art after conceptual art, see Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, eds. *Art After Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, MA, London, and Vienna: The MIT Press and Generali Foundation, 2006).

<sup>590</sup> Osborne, "Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy," p. 64.

modernism is its unfulfilled promise to politicize the art world through recourse to philosophical language, and this aspect of its historical trajectory is not complete until years after *Index 01*.

I have also shown how Art & Language's efforts to rethink the politics of the art world themselves reached an impasse in 1976, when two opposed positions emerged within the group, solidified themselves, and proved irreconcilable to one another. Art & Language could no longer sustain their efforts to practice art in an oppositional manner within an art world they deemed politically unsatisfactory while also seeking to create distance from that very art world in order to pursue their political aims artistically unfettered by it. Here, on the brink of a substantial achievement — at the moment when Art & Language could possibly have thought in one thought both a vision of a different art world and a concrete path to actualizing it — they encountered an aporia, a point of no passage. In a manner without precedent in their work, language fails them and they in turn fail it, and the collective suddenly lacks the means to resolve their diverse individual interests into a direction in which to proceed together. It is here, in New York in 1976 and not with *Index 01*, that Art & Language's contribution to conceptual art reaches its terminal point, a point beyond which they cannot continue without setting out in a direction discontinuous with their past. As if anticipating Osborne's claim for conceptual art, Art & Language's participants themselves noted the failure of their group and the broader movement to which it belonged and also perceived its hidden accomplishment. Terry Atkinson, who left Art & Language in 1974, noted twenty years later, "the failures of Conceptualism were much more intellectually engaging than the achievements of its successes in the museum and the market, such as they were."<sup>591</sup> Ian Burn created the category of the "Ex-Conceptual" in 1981 to draw attention to the role conceptual art played for those, such as himself, to whom it was not

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<sup>591</sup> Terry Atkinson, "Rites of Passage," *Art & Design* 34 (1994): p. 13.

foremost an iteration in the art historical sequence of modernist styles but rather a path out of that trajectory toward a socially engaged art practice divorced from the teleology of modernism. “The real value of Conceptual Art,” he wagers, “lay in its *transitional* (and thus genuinely historical) character, not in the style itself.”<sup>592</sup> Thus, as Charles Harrison wrote decades after the fact, Art & Language’s complex pasts were “to be lived with as forms of history.”<sup>593</sup>

The breakdown of Art & Language in 1976 engulfed the entire collective, and the conflicts that precipitated them emerged to a considerable degree from Art & Language’s struggle to manage their expanding internationality. When the group finally exploded — in contrast to their earlier implosion, which led them to create *Index 01* — it did so internationally and along national lines. Within a few years, nearly everyone who had participated in Art & Language returned to (or remained in) the country of his or her birth (Mayo Thompson is an exception), and all continued to work, at least for a time, as artists, activists, both, or neither, in directions deeply marked by the conflicts that Art & Language addressed in 1976, mostly by way of involvement in local struggles of an artistic or political character. If a vanishing mediator depends, as Osborne notes, on its “catalytic and constitutive effects upon the meaning of subsequent practices rather than on its ability to endure or even succeed within its own terms,” then the most immediate legacy of Art & Language is the practices of its erstwhile and continuing participants from 1977 onward, as they transmitted its lessons and elaborated their consequences in the United States, England, Australia, Canada, and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Ian Burn, “The ‘Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath (or the Memoirs of an Ex-Conceptual Artist)” (1981) in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, p. 405.

<sup>593</sup> Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (1991) (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 128.

<sup>594</sup> Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” p. 65.

The impasses that Art & Language reached — the seeming impossibility of a radical transformative project engaging the established institutions, discourses, and social forms that it must in order to achieve its aims without sacrificing those aims in the process, sustaining such a project in spite of its own internal contradictions, the conflicting needs of people and groups of people suspended between worlds in which they have different investments and obligations — persist as problems not only for them and for other artists dissatisfied with an art world but for anyone who wishes to see any world better itself through the patient work of developing ways for people to be together and talk to one another as well as means for ensuring the continuity and evolution of those ways. And yet, given the extent of Art & Language's thought about incommensurability, the most enduring aspect of their legacy may well prove to be the practical strategies they developed to persist in the absence of a common measure. What they extend beyond their own actions and the body of work they left behind after 1976 are a number of compelling models for, to phrase the matter in their terminology and thereby on their terms, going-on.

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